TOWARDS AN INFRASTRUCTURE OF HUMANS

VAN ABBE

Working Group Statements
Humans of the Institution
25–27 November 2017

University of Bergen
Faculty of Fine Art,
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IMAGINARIES
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Foreword

Charles Esche and Steven ten Thije

Humans can exist without an institution, yet no institution can function without humans. Institutions to a large degree are the people who work in them, but they are also more than just a group of individuals working together. What then does the institutional part of an institution contain? What allows a gathering of people to become more than the sum of all its parts? And in the age of neo-liberal self-exploitation, are institutions still operative in the interests of the individuals involved?

As is well known, recent decades have transformed the cultural sector. Sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello identified that the culture industry was one of the models for the neo-liberal already in 1999, and with its networked economy it has become a frontrunner in developing precarious labour conditions ever since. The freelance artist has been the norm in the sector from the early-twentieth century onwards, and today freelancing and zero-hour contracts dominate all aspects of employment. Like with all things, there is a positive side: in the cultural sector, freelancing does offer greater flexibility and the chance for art and cultural workers to set their own working limits or pursue international careers by working on a portfolio of projects in many different and exciting locations. The downsides, however, are precarious conditions, lack of workers' rights and protection, fragmented life and work biographies and a lack of longer-term, mutual commitment to people and places. Many cultural workers are in fact forced into flexibility, destined to try to sell their personalities – not as acts of free will, but as a means to survive. Success is often measured by the number of commissions achieved rather than their eventual results, to the frustration of all parties. How to confront and respond to this situation is an immense challenge that

well-meaning institutions and their freelance associates face day by day.

Ironically, given the culture industries' pivotal role in neo-liberalism, globalisation in general is led primarily by the expansion of markets rather than curiosity about cultures. While neo-liberal proselytisers have promised endlessly productive and joyful competition between clever, quick entrepreneurs across the world, the economic landscape it has actually produced is full of monster corporations that define protocols and manipulate standards in their own interests. The tendency towards monopolies in different industries has its parallels in the art world, with increasingly fewer commercial galleries and art museums serving as the major gatekeepers to artistic careers and curatorial survival. For good and a lot of bad, the majority of cultural institutions today are forced to navigate as small parasites feeding off the self-glorifying charity of big capital and its owners. Alternatively, they survive on a weakened and reluctant state-funding apparatus that also demands conformity to capitalist market mechanisms, constant innovation and the creation of new spaces and new publics where alternatives to the blockbuster exhibition and the media event are squeezed. Despite all of this, through good management of resources, opportunities are still opened up to communicate more effectively to more diverse publics, and to build a wider base of research to tell stories from multiple perspectives.

This varigated landscape of finance and ethics has a huge impact on the people who are asked to organise culture, whether employed or freelance. The demands on time and the expectations of ever-improving delivery mean that efficiency is prized above all, and often the simplest measure of financial return on investment is the major criterion for political support and cultural success. This complicated environment constantly connects opportunities to risks, it opposes continuity

and care for heritage to creative destruction, time to think and research to short-term public impact, the exploitation of interlinked data to the needs for privacy, building international networks to consciousness of planet and climate change. In the worst cases life is opposed to work, and the possibilities for art are destroyed by the logic of capital. As a result, finding the balance between ethics and action is a constant negotiation and for the freelancer much of this must be done in isolation.

Working in an art institution like the Van Abbemuseum, these are part of our daily diet of questions and struggles in trying to live and act well. Many institutions with similar desires to ours are caught in the dilemma. We like to rely on a certain predictability and are designed to repeat processes to arrive at manageable outcomes. We are therefore generally better at maintaining organisation and structure than implementing innovation and radical change. Even 'creative' cultural institutions have this characteristic; a museum collects, a Kunsthalle exhibits, a gallery sells. Yet, as neo-liberalism coursed through the world in the past 30 years, it has shown little tolerance or respect for such institutional characteristics and their values. Cultural institutions are usually seen as obstructions on the road to more creativity, greater efficiency or more popular programming. They are the arms of a despised government bureaucracy opposed to freedom and market discipline. Yet, for all their stubbornness, institutions do give voice to collective desires that exceed the individual consumer; they resist change in positive as well as negative ways, protecting values and histories that might otherwise be lost, allowing voices to speak that the market cannot accommodate. The demand for institutional dynamism is understandable, but the goals of the desired change need to be discussed by a broad range of stakeholders and not only the narrow group of the

economically privileged that usually occupy museum and other cultural boards of governance. Exploring ways to intervene in governance structures and make better protocols and ways of aligning the sometimes contradictory interests of artists, freelancers, employees, collectors and donors is crucial. This requires innovation in the public interest and reshaping how museums and other institutions are managed. Indeed, such reforms might be the only way human values and institutional priorities can be brought back into alignment. That is certainly the contention of this publication.

The texts and accounts here present the results of the international gathering called *Humans of the Institution* that took place in November 2017 in Amsterdam. The event aspired to confront the unspoken conditions of cultural employment and activity in a unique manner. The organisers, Anne Szefer Karlsen and Vivian Ziherl, are pioneers in asking how art life can be debated and improved. They brought together a large and diverse group of cultural professionals to discuss urgent topics that mark today's practices in a theatrical setting that aided exchange and discussion. The majority of the participants were freelance cultural professionals, who were joined by the staff of different institutions that recognise the importance of this discussion. The Van Abbemuseum was honoured to be one of these institutions, and as part of this collaboration is proud to act as host for the outcomes of the gathering in these pages. We want to do what we can as an institution to encourage this debate and promote more open exchange on these matters. We do this in order to learn how to be better and address blind spots ourselves, while recognising how we often fail to live up to our ideals.

By hosting this e-publication, the Van Abbemuseum hopes to be a useful platform for dialogue in an extended way about the current conditions of our cultural practice. We would like to congratulate Anne and Vivian: firstly on the conference itself, which was a remarkably energetic and inspiring few days, and also on this beautiful and inspiring e-book that will hopefully radiate light in many directions.

Charles Esche and Steven ten Thije
Van Abbmuseum Eindhoven, April 2019



A landscape of different types of chairs was placed on a silver grid at Veem House for Performance as part of the spatial design by Uglycute, converting the room from a theater for monologues to a space of dialogue.

Introduction

Towards an Infrastructure of Humans

Anne Szefer Karlsen and Vivian Ziherl

It is with great pleasure that we share the e-publication *Towards an Infrastructure of Humans*, gathering working group statements arising from the *Humans of the Institution* talks and workshops organised in Amsterdam, 25 to 27 November 2017, as well as further affiliated events in Montevideo, Oslo and Glasgow.

Humans of the Institution was initiated by and for freelance curators and welcomed colleagues across all other areas of the arts, to explore how to organise and understand freelancing in the light of post-1989 globalising trajectories, as well as greater colonial and anti-colonial processes. Part of the project centred upon challenging and re-imagining the role and operations of museum institutions. This document is the result of the collective efforts that went into the project, and we are very pleased to present this e-publication with Van Abbemuseum, a museum that we look to as a partner in transformative work.

The title of this introduction – *Towards an Infrastructure of Humans* – is inspired by the keynote contribution from Ahmed Veriava, who shared his work with the Johannesburg Anti-Privatisation Forum. His discussion of the vast informal economies of water use in Johannesburg, and their vulnerable yet resistant movement against predatory pricing practices, offered valuable conceptual tools that were called upon throughout the programme. He alerted us to the notion of 'people as infrastructure', and proposed to politically charge the concept with a mobile form of collaboration, underpinned by the strategic rationality of networks that people establish to create forms of governmentality.

In a time when the failures of globalisation – aesthetically, ecologically, financially, culturally, politically, and otherwise – are increasingly impossible to ignore, we

decided to convene a large-scale, yet sited conversation on the freelancer as a crucial figure in these processes. We called it *Humans of the Institution*, a title that implies both individuals and groups, with the aim to challenge assumptions, habits and expectations of 'industry standards' in the arts. Our agenda, however, was pragmatic: *Humans of the Institution* was prompted by a wish to gather and work together towards practical outcomes. This pragmatism emerged from a conviction in the often un-tapped potential of conference formats as productive gatherings for awareness building, consensus generating and in setting agendas for direct action. As a consequence of this train of thought, an informal international network consisting of organisations, patrons and funding bodies was created for the purpose of the project with the aim to garner support for the participation of freelance curators. As a result, a large and broad international attendance was facilitated through the commitment of individuals as well as institutions.[1]

The programme foregrounded freelance experiences in the arts, taking into account the potential to challenge or transform institutional structures, distributions of non/employment at global scales, and emerging regimes of networked governance. Following the initial weekend programme, a series of Working Groups were held.[2] These semi-public workshops took the conversations that emerged over the weekend as their basis and were transposed into focused and practically oriented forums for fact-finding, awareness raising, solidarity and concrete action. Each Working Group was asked to produce a statement on their focus area, with conveners invited to prepare the agenda and approach of each group.[3] The Working Groups' task was ambitious and intensive; with only six hours to delve into a specific discussion, followed by two hours to distil a text that would be further edited and then published. The groups took a wide array of approaches, including writing urgent calls to action, describing broader reflections, occasionally producing more literary reflections upon a topic or tactic, as well as specific policy recommendations to the Dutch Mondriaan Fund, which sought direct input from Humans of the Institution and supported the initiative through its research and innovation programme.

The six Amsterdam Working Groups were titled: *Archives & Individuals, Biennials & Guest Work, Boycott & Mobilisation, Censorship & Strategy, Critical Regionalism,* and *Fees & Conditions*. The affiliated Working Groups took place in Montevideo (Uruguay), Oslo (Norway) and Glasgow (Scotland), as well as during the Dutch Art Institute Roaming Assembly in Amsterdam, and tackled the following topics: *Art Education & the Romance of the Studio, Curating & Ethics, Practices & Infrastructure* and *Institutional Negotiations*. The Statements that followed these days of discussions and exchange are collected in this volume and can broadly be divided in to two categories: 'calls for action' and 'status reports'.

Early in the process of *Humans of the Institution* we were made aware of the Norwegian Association of Curators' efforts to undertake a national survey to map the working conditions of their members. We are very grateful to the Association for deciding to make their survey, titled *The Norwegian Association of Curators – Members' Working Conditions and Potential Employers*, public for the first time in Amsterdam. They contributed to the Working Group *Fees & Conditions*, pairing up with two artists' organisations that have made impressive strides in securing fees for artists: Platform BK in the Netherlands and W.A.G.E. in the USA. This Working Group in particular has made visible that historical and current artist activism can provide a precedent for freelance curators, which is an important basis for further solidarity among arts workers.

The concerns shared in the *Fees & Conditions* group were also shared by the students at the Dutch Art Institute, one of the main institutional supporters of the programme. They set themselves the task to answer the question 'Which policies would you make mandatory in public art institutions when it comes to their treatment of artists?' The Working Group participants already have an understanding of what is to come in their professional careers. Their chief priorities were proper working agreements between institutions and artists, and that a commitment to the artists' practices should be foregrounded by the institutions. Realising that the fulfilment of these demands is still some way away, they titled this Affiliated Working Group *Institutional Negotiations*, focusing on the, at times, unequal dialogue between artist and institution. Both the *Fees & Conditions* and *Institutional Negotiations* statements relate to highly formalised contexts, although not necessarily sited in a specific location.

The Critical Regionalism Working Group and the Affiliated Working Group *Practices & Infrastructure* tackled specific contexts – of non-urban practice in the Netherlands on the one hand, and the national Scottish context on the other. Within the *Critical Regionalism* group regional arts practitioners from the Netherlands (including the Antilles) and Northern Norway, as well as policy developers from Scotland and Finland, quickly discovered that they face similar challenges, which may connect regional actors across international locations more strongly than those between regional and urban actors within a national context.

The Practices & Infrastructure Working Group in Glasgow happened to be convened in January 2018 on the same day as the 'monolithic funding body' Creative Scotland announced which arts organisations would, and which would not, receive several years of support through their Regular Funding scheme.[4] That day, Transmission in Glasgow – an organisation set up in 1983 by graduates from the Glasgow School of Art – had their funding withdrawn. The ensuing statement from Transmission indicated that the decision could be seen as discriminatory, 'conscious or otherwise'[5], and a sign of an increasingly politicised and top-down management of cultural funding which in many Northern European countries over the last fifty odd years have been based on peer review, and even grassroots decision-making. This case made visible most clearly the opacity of the art world, which is also pervasive in the non-market driven sectors. The statement from Glasgow ends with calls to change hiring policies in institutions, for the reinstating of peer-review processes for public funding, and a commitment to work against freelancers undercutting each other in pay negotiations.

The *Biennials & Guest Work* group also base their statement on calls for action towards transparency – broadening the impression of insufficient accountability, not only within localised institutions and funding bodies like those in Scotland, but also in the global networks of biennials. In a manner similar to the *Fees & Conditions* group, a pronounced need for fact-finding and transparency was the driving force in the biennial group. Their statement disentangles the fraught relationship between biennials and the art market, in other words revealing 'the political economy' of the biennials. The take home from this for a curator is that being appointed to curate a biennial lead to complex alliances and loyalties, where it might be difficult – as an individual – to provide full transparency about one's working conditions and to start changing the professional standards needed in this part of the art world.

The Boycott & Mobilisation statement exemplifies and makes visible the amount of knowledges and expe-



‘Balcony Caller’ Ahilapalapa Rands. The role of the ‘Balcony Caller’ was devised for Humans of the Institution in order to create a position between ‘speaker’ and ‘audience’, to offer continuity across the two days, and to mandate perspectives that are important to an international conversation on freelancing, organised by curators.



Speaker Rachel O'Reilly navigating the space of Veem House for Performance.

rience that were gathered in all the Working Groups. Acting as both an account of the discussions in the room, as well as providing suggestions for freelancers and institutions, the conclusion from the *Boycott & Mobilisation* Working Group contributed the following powerful statement: 'Boycotts do make institutions more sensitive, more vulnerable and more apt to change. Therefore we, art producers as well as representatives of art institutions, should not suppress them, but seriously work through their claims. They are forms of mobilisation, not a form of "quitting".'

Another mode of account is present in the statement from the *Censorship & Strategy* Working Group, where the participants decided to stay (semi-)anonymous, to avoid self-censoring and to 'preserve the divergence and difference of opinion within the conversation'. The document reveals that censorship is a particularly evasive category, with local and cultural specificities playing crucial roles. Brushing up against ideas of boycott as well as mobilisation, the statement ends with a challenge to curators to find ways of making visible that which might stand a risk of censorship.

The *Archives & Individuals* Working Group developed their statement, titled *Some working notes on engaging with archives in an afternoon*, collectively, where they, too, challenge the curator in their attempt at making visible that which might not otherwise be visible. In the quest of searching through, engaging with and taking care of archives, the group gives 14 recommendations on how to relate to the archive as a curator. 'Each archive involves a debatable starting point; each account of art historical facts and narratives create the possibilities for yet other ones' they write, thus also addressing the ethical challenges for the curator in the archive.

In Oslo, the Affiliated Working Group *Curating & Ethics* also tried to tackle important and complex ethical discussions for curators, resulting in an extensive collaboratively written statement. The text presented here is a version of a longer statement, and we hope that the energy and commitment to the discussion is still visible in the edited version published here. They propose 'that being ethical involves taking the risk of working beyond institutional norms and supports', a statement that leads us to another Affiliated Working Group Statement: *Art Education & the Romance of the Studio* in Montevideo. We are proud as organisers that this was the first event of a new *taller* (workshop) at Instituto Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes (IENBA), by the first ever female professor at this art academy: artist Ana Laura López de la Torre. Invitations were sent to friends and colleagues internationally to engage from their locations with *Humans of the Institution*. López de la Torre took the opportunity to investigate her new role and space. Her interest in creating both an educational and closed space, alongside a public and open space, resonated well with the overall programme we staged in Amsterdam.

For the organisers of *Humans of the Institution*, this was the first occasion in which to gather and discuss the field specifically from the perspective of freelance work. It was therefore not imagined that any outcome could possibly prove definitive or transformative exclusively in and of its own right. We were thrilled and excited when working group convener Platform BK reported that they had been contacted by freelance curators in the Netherlands, and consequently set up a working group to establish much needed guidelines for remuneration for curators shortly after *Humans of the Institution*. The initiative of Platform BK to draft a specific statement to the national government and its arts funding agency, petitioning for action on the working conditions of freelance curators must be seen in the light of the

existing achievement in the Netherlands of a national directive on artists' fees. We hope that these texts and the dialogues that emerged may be of use to further actions, and to any number of campaigns or efforts.

We will always be grateful for the overwhelming support we experienced for the programme of *Humans of the Institution* and would like to point the reader in the direction of the extensive lists of acknowledgments and thanks in the credits and colophon of this publication. The individuals, as well as the institutions and the funding bodies (populated by individuals and positive forces) have created a network of support for us and each other in the process, and we are certain that many will have forged lifelong relations – we know that we as organisers have.

Anne Szefer Karlsen and Vivian Ziherl
online, May 2018





Position papers Sunday 26 November by Antonia Majaca (top) and Bassam El Baroni (bottom).









Salsa lecture (top, left), communal lunch (bottom, left), audience members Rana Anani, Antoni Pittas and unknown audience member (top, right). Christina Li, Lian van Schaik, Rhea Dall and Manuela Moscoso (bottom, right).

1. The delegate partners network included L'appartement 22, Artspace Aotearoa, La Biennale de Lyon, Blind Carbon Copy, Chapter Thirteen, Creative Scotland in partnership with Scottish Contemporary Art Network, Frans Hals Museum | De Hallen Haarlem, KORO/Public Art Norway, Musée d'art contemporain du Val-de-Marne, Netwerk Aalst, The Office for Contemporary Art Norway (OCA), and SAHA.

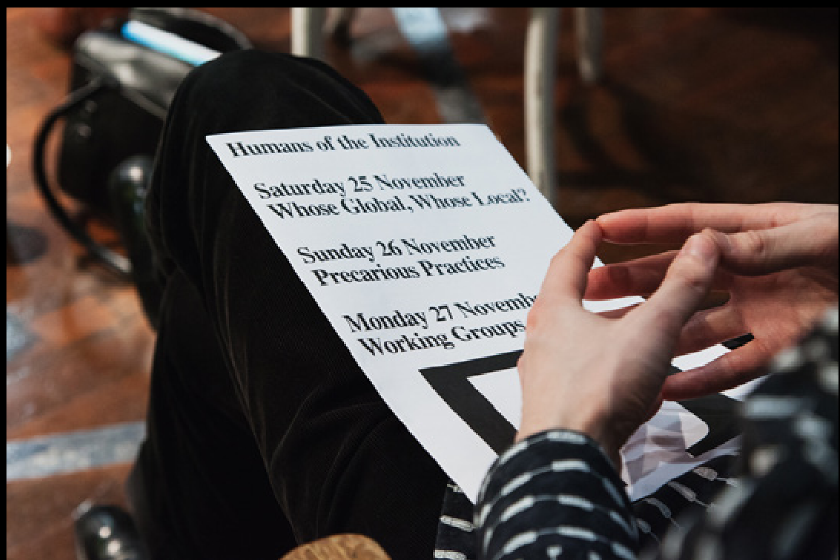
2. A network of institutional hosts supported this part of the programme: De Appel, Framer Framed, Frans Hals Museum | De Hallen Haarlem, Manifesta Foundation, New Urban Collective and Stedelijk Museum.

3. Please see each working group statement for the names of the conveners and participants.

4. See the statement 'Practices & Infrastructure – Begging, stealing, borrowing' for further contextualisation of the Scottish situation.

5. 'The cultural capital that Transmission generates, though measurable, does not have the kind of payoff that Creative Scotland as a financial body wishes to continue to invest in. It is too messy and unpredictable, subject to quick change. While perhaps not explicitly racist, queerphobic, etc., it could be inferred that Creative Scotland does not see the expressions of these communities in their active, unrefined, ungentrified forms as being valuable, or the timing of this decision to be particularly loaded, and thus acts from a position of institutional bias in which which racism, queerphobia and so forth emerge. This implicit neglect of people working on the margins also extends to affect the broader membership of Transmission, regardless of background.' See https://mailchi.mp/5941e5be915a/transmissions-creative-scotland-funding-response-statement (accessed 9 May 2018).





Some of the production team of *Humans of the Institution*. From left to right: Anne Szefer Karlsen (Curator), Marc Hollenstein (Designer), Lady Tatiana Prieto Lozano (Spatial design assistant), Markus Degerman and Jonas Nobel (Spatial designers, Uglycute), Lua Vollaard (Project manager), Lian van Schaik (Intern), Vivian Ziherl (Curator), Emilie van Heydoorn (General Manager, Frontier Imaginaries) and Anne Breure (Director, Veem House for Performance) (top). Programme folder designed by Marc Hollenstein (bottom).



The 'dressed H', which created the backbone of the design by Marc Hollenstein for *Humans of the Institution*.

Fees & Conditions

Amsterdam

The Working *Group Fees & Conditions* was hosted by the Frans Hals Museum | De Hallen Haarlem on Monday 27 November 2017.

Convened by Platform BK (Joram Kraaijeveld and Rune Peitersen) and the Norwegian Association of curators (Martin Braathen and Silja Leifsdottir), with W.A.G.E. (Lise Soskolne), assisted by Rick Heron and Mack McFarland.

Participants were: Florence Cheval, Kris Dittel, Benjamin Fallon, larose s. larose, Taylor Le Melle, Nat Muller, Miriam H. Wistreich, Lesley Young and Önder Özengi.

The circumstances of the workshop: 16 people met from 10am to 5pm to discuss fees and conditions for the freelance curator, after which they were tasked with providing a written statement for *Humans of the Institution* within one hour.

The convenors and participants support the construction of a future cogent analysis and summary of this working group's topic, which would require more labour than has been budgeted for on this occasion. Ironically, the circumstances of the Working Group mirrored the conditions we had gathered to analyse and strategise around. Making a clear statement reflecting upon these conditions became paramount to the entire group during the discussions of the day. It is, however, not our intention to shame the organisers, but rather to highlight that we, as cultural workers, too often willingly participate in creating the conditions of our own exploitation. Any first step towards an improvement of this situation must acknowledge this and include a willingness to speak openly about

issues concerning remuneration.

If the aims of the workshop were to articulate the need of curators to secure equitable working conditions and compensation, we believe it is necessary to consider the conditions under which the labour of this workshop and its response were executed. The group consisted of 16 people, including five convenors and 11 participants. Two of the convenors were remunerated €200 each, while three of the convenors were asked to volunteer their time and labour on the basis that they were already gainfully employed. The 11 participants volunteered their time by joining the group and in the editorial process of preparing the Working Group's statement.

During the conversation, we acknowledged the ways that we submit ourselves to unpaid labour in our curatorial practice in order to produce the quality of work our projects demand. Today's workshop was often a corollary reflecting the conditions we encounter in our careers across a much longer time scale, which include compromising our financial well-being and ownership of free time to accomplish our work goals.

The following includes an account of both discussion points and their outcomes:

- A comprehensive list of the labour performed by curators was compiled using a document originally produced in 2012 in a W.A.G.E. workshop with students attending Bard College's Center for Curatorial Studies. The conditions added to the list during the workshop indicated how the field has shifted, and makes evident the additional burden that increased and normalised precarity has placed on freelance curators. Without institutional support, freelance curators often act as their own autonomous institutions, becoming responsible for a range of tasks beyond the curatorial. This in addition to taking on many of the expenses an institution would conventionally be responsible for. Like all gig-economy workers, and artists, the freelance curator performs an excess of unpaid labour and takes on additional expenses with the expectation that these investments will eventually pay (off).

- Activism around artists' fees, payments, and conditions can act as a model for how curators might organise and/or make use of established fee calculators in order to arrive at pay standards for curatorial work.

- We realise that accomplishing goals of fairer remuneration for curatorial work may lead to degrowth. Doing less for more money by implementing reform has the potential to defeat some of our other objectives. Increasing fees de-incentivises more curatorial opportunities.

- We recognise our conditions do not exist in a vacuum, but are only one part of much larger systems and economies. We do not prioritise our needs above others and seek to find solidarity among our peers working in other cultural sectors.

- Make as much information about payments publicly visible. The Norwegian Association of Curators undertook a national survey to this effect in 2017. *Norsk Kuratorforening – kuratorens arbeidsvilkår og oppdragsgivere* (Norwegian Association of Curators – Members' Working Conditions and Potential Employers) is available here.

- Saying 'No' to unfair projects and conditions, and making that visible, is a key collective action. 'No' is universal.

- Further discussion and research is needed to discern whether freelance curators base remunerative demands on living wage standards, or choose to be paid on a lump-sum fee basis, as artists commonly are.

POSTSCRIPT:

After the workshop and presentation of our conclusions to the rest of the Humans of the Institution *participants, a number of freelance curators contacted Platform BK to enquire about the possibility of developing a guideline for curators' fees along the same lines as had recently been done for artists' fees in the Netherlands. A working group has now been set up within the framework of Platform BK, and we are hopeful that this will lead to a better understanding and acknowledgement of the work of the freelance curator as well as an actual guideline for remuneration of their work.*





Anne Breure, Director of Veem House for Performance, welcoming the audience Saturday 25 November 2017 (top). From left; Speaker Bassam El Baroni, delegate Adeline Lepiné (supported by La Biennale de Lyon), curator Anne Szefer Karlsen and speaker Sabina Sabolović (bottom).





Curator Vivian Ziherl (top), Arkadiusz Półtorak (De Appel Curatorial Programme participant) (bottom).

Institutional Negotiations

Amsterdam

The Working Group *Institutional Negotiations* was hosted by the Veem House for Performance on Sunday 26 November 2017.

Convened by Sabina Sabolović.

Participants from the Dutch Art Institute were: Jonathan Baumgartner, Agata Cieslak, Sarah Cattin, Jasmin Schaedler, Leeron Tur-Kaspa, Floris Visser and Polly Wright.

The participants were asked to consider the following question: Which policies would you make mandatory in public art institutions when it comes to their treatment of artists? After a lively discussion based on their individual proposals, the group formulated two policies that they felt were important to share.

POLICY 1
A Clear Value System

A public institution should have a clear value system that is implemented through a signed working agreement with each creative contributor. This agreement should describe the working conditions for both parties. It should include, for example, the amount of compensation for physical and intellectual labour, the ownership of creative authorship rights – including a Creative Commons option as a possible preference of the artist – mutual obligations and agreements on dissemination of any stage of the project.

Within the agreement, it should be clear that the institution has an obligation to define and justify a minimum fee. This regulation would provide basic working conditions. It would also open up the possibility of building a

union of cultural workers to demand and enforce such rights.

Alongside the agreement, the institution’s mission statement should clearly define its relationship with the artist. In addition, every publicly funded institution should have an annual report available online within three months of the end of the financial year. The report should include both the mission statement and a generic version of the artist’s agreement.

POLICY 2
Commitment

All publicly funded institutions should embrace the artists and their practice, working towards the benefit and well-being of the artist in both economic and non-economic terms. They should constantly reflect on the depth and responsiveness of their connection to artists and their practices, as well as on their own local and social contexts. As a consequence, institutions should learn from each encounter and be able to quickly adjust their policies where necessary. A committed relationship between the institution and the artist based on equality and shared responsibility should be established and maintained.









Speakers in the plenum *Whose Global, Whose Local?*, Saturday 25 November 2017 Thomas Bakker & Iris Bouwmeester, Club Solo (top, left), Natasha Ginwala (bottom, left), Sabina Sabolović (top, right) and Carol Yinghua Lu (bottom, right).





Speakers in the plenum *Whose Global, Whose Local?*, Saturday 25 November 2017
Lara Khaldi (top) and Alan Michelson (bottom).

Critical Regionalism

Peer to Peer Regionalism

Amsterdam

The Working Group *Critical Regionalism* was hosted by the Stedelijk Museum on Monday 27 November 2017.

Convened by Thomas Bakker, Iris Bouwmeester and Sharelly Emanuelson, assisted by Hanne Gudrun Gulljord and Lian van Schaik.

Participants were: Çelenk Bafra, Ericka Florez, Diewke van den Heuvel, Anna Jensen, Tuğçe Karataş, Alexandra Landré, Susan McAteer, Sarah MacIntyre, Arkadiusz Półtorak, Karolin Tampere and Vivian Ziherl.

The group discussed regional art practice with perspectives from Noord Brabant and Curaçao (the Netherlands), Tromsø and Lofoten (Norway), Scotland, Australia, Finland, Ireland, Turkey and Poland. Given the present national discussion in the Netherlands on art's regionalisation, notes that may have specific Dutch impact have been added alongside the statement.

Do we need coherent strategies of regionalisation in the arts?

The first response to this came from a working group member based in Lofoten (Norway): 'There should be *arts* in the regions because there should be *people* in the regions.'

The working group proposes the framework of 'human infrastructure' through which to understand the importance of the arts in regional contexts. Just as basic utilities of communications and transport networks are crucial in enabling regional communities to be maintained, so too is the human infrastructure of regional arts programming and production.

What could arts regionalisation offer, and what could its pitfalls be?

One of the most important opportunities identified within the working group was the potential for exchange and support laterally across regional contexts, both within and beyond the national scale.

Regional arts practitioners from the Netherlands (including the Antilles) and Norway, as well as policy developers from Scotland and Finland, quickly discovered that they face similar challenges that may connect regional actors across international locations even more strongly than regional and urban actors within a national context.

It was identified among the regional actors in the group, for instance, that a context can have quite specific challenges – because of the size of the population – where only one art venue may be established to service a location. What form of art institution can maintain vitality in such case? What tools can help to maintain openness and innovation? How can an art centre perform multiple roles within regional communities?

One specific issue was raised: within regional locations inter-generational dynamics can have an exaggerated significance, and determine, for example, where a particular artist community establishes itself, and subsequently – intentionally or otherwise – obstruct the development of newer generations due to the scarcity of resources and infrastructure.

What role could public institutions and public funding play, in contexts where these are available?

The Working Group noted that a conversation on regionalisms benefits from being in dialogue with contexts that are diverse in their funding base – with and without public support.

A conversation on public policy and public funding focused on the Netherlands with the following key points:

- There is a need for an arts policy vision among regional councils in the Netherlands. Without this, public funding lacks a tier dedicated to the needs of regional arts from a specifically regional perspective.

- Regionalisation should not effectively take place by devolving resources to regional or local levels at present. This would add layers of administration between funds available and arts practitioners, and thus be counter-productive. In addition, it would require resources at a level that currently is in need of development of an arts policy agenda.

- Funding bodies at different levels should be aware of other's agendas. It was suggested that local arts guidelines should be developed and that that could take place laterally across regions.

- In the Dutch Antilles it was noted that sports tend to absorb the limited available resources, particularly in education, and that there is a major challenge with regards to events-based forms of practice such as theatre and music.

Where public funding exists, should the criteria for regional arts be different from metropolitan-based arts activities?

A better question would be: Who can judge artistic merit in a regional context?









Working Group Convener Katia Krupennikova (top, left), and Lady Tatiana Prieto Lozano (MA Curatorial Practice, UiB and spatial design assistant) (bottom, left). Both wearing the colour coded tapes indicating which Working Group they participated in on Monday 27 November 2017. Working Group Convener Michell Wong (top, right) and speaker Charles Esche (bottom, right).

Due to the lack of regional arts policies in the Netherlands, judgement on artistic merit is deferred to the national level. The asymmetry of this situation is dramatised in decision-making on artistic merit in the Antilles, where a remote perspective may not have any insight into actual impact on the ground.

The availability of examples of successful applications – including the argumentation towards artistic objectives and plans of implementation – can have a heightened significance for regional actors. This is particularly the case where it is not easy or straightforward to arrange an appointment with a funding officer.

In Norway funding assessment committees include artists from both the regions and elsewhere in the country. However, this often depends on administrators who have knowledge and understanding of the need to keep up certain standards.

What could regionalisation mean beyond national framings, is there a trans-regional potential?

The potential of peer-to-peer regionalism, rather than a hub and spoke notion of arts development, emerged as an immediate and very convincing area of opportunity. This would involve acknowledging that there is specific knowledge in what vitality in the arts means within non-urban settings.

It was suggested that the Working Group could become the nucleus of a trans-regional arts initiative, focusing on knowledge sharing in relation to the specific questions of regional vitality in the arts. It would suggest that this could be co-funded internationally with resources from, for example, the Netherlands, Scotland, Norway, Turkey and Finland. In acknowledgement of the value of learning across different contexts – including those without public funding – a 'delegate partners' model was proposed, in which each supporter contributes towards guests to whom funding is not readily available.

POSSIBLE INITIATIVES TOWARDS REGIONAL VITALITY IN THE ARTS IN THE NETHERLANDS

Specifically, from the Dutch perspective, a coherent programme for arts regionalisation is needed for the following reasons:

- The regional and municipal levels of arts funding are experienced as highly opaque. It is often not clear what the administrative processes are, which creates substantial issues in attempting to schedule and plan regionally based projects.

- There do not appear to be locally-set arts policies in regional settings. It was reported that regionally based initiatives find that they can match local funding by default where projects have been supported nationally by the Mondriaan Fund. The assessment of the quality of the project is therefore simply deferred to following the national decision. This creates an 'all-or-nothing' situation from the regional position. It also means that a conversation on arts priorities at the level of regional policy-making does not take place. Regionalisation in the Netherlands should therefore address the need for informed and engaged local policy conversations.

- In the context of the Netherlands, the Working Group agreed that the experiences and knowledge of colleagues in the Dutch Antilles bring enormous value, insight and depth to the conversation on Dutch regional arts vitality. Colleagues from Noord Brabant, in particular, expressed strong solidarity with the experiences, struggles and positive experiences of their colleague from Curaçao. It was the strong shared opinion of the Working Group

members that a conversation on regionalisation in the Netherlands should not take place without the Dutch Antilles – as a matter of principle and to ensure depth and wealth.

TEN RECOMMENDATIONS TOWARDS ARTS REGIONALISATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

- Stimulate the development of provincial policy visions for the arts.
- Stimulate awareness and collaboration across policy and programmes among national, provincial and municipal tiers of arts support.
- Stimulate a trans-regional framework of peer-to-peer regional exchange, within the Netherlands and as part of an internationally networked initiative.
- Consider assessing regional project proposals laterally across regional areas.
- Frame arts support within a concept of 'human infrastructure'.
- Ensure the availability of examples of successful funding submissions so that regional actors are not disadvantaged by the inability to easily make face-to-face appointments with funding officers.
- Ensure that the Dutch Antilles are an integral part of dialogues and programme development on regionalisation in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.
- Require artists and organisations to report on how they support or consider regional artistic vitality, and to articulate what their position within the local cultural ecosystem is.
- Ensure rotation of advisors to submissions from the Antilles in order to support different perspectives on regional art activities.
- Is there any research into the status of regional arts policy perspectives? If so, can it be disseminated? If not, can research be undertaken?









Speakers in the plenum *Precarious Practices* Sunday 26 November: Manuela Moscoso (top, left), Heejin Kim (bottom, left), Maria Hlavajova (top, right) and Matthijs de Bruijne (bottom, right).









Speakers in the plenum *Precarious Practices* Sunday 26 November 2017: Natalia Valencia (top, left), Nana Oforiatta-Ayim (bottom, left), Imara Limon (top, right) and audience (bottom, right).

Practices & Infrastructure

Begging, Stealing, Borrowing

Glasgow

The Affiliated Working Group *Practices & Infrastructure* was hosted by Curatorial Studio at The Glasgow School of Art's Reid Gallery on 26 January 2018. Curatorial Studio is a project devised by Kirsteen Macdonald, and managed by SCAN–Scottish Contemporary Art Network.

Convened by Kirsteen Macdonald and Anne Szefer Karlsen.

Participants: Ben Callaghan, Camilla Crosta, John McDougall, Nikki Kane, Yvonne Billimore, Cicely Farrer, Frances Davis, Gordon Douglas, Katherine Murphy, Marcus Jack, Seonaid Daly, Jennifer Clews, Naoko Mabon, Peter Basma-Lord, Rachel Woodside.

This statement is based on the urgency to nuance the dichotomy of an 'us' and a 'them' in the Scottish visual art field (aka 'the sector'). The group collectively decided to create a statement to address the peers of those in the room – be they artists, curators, volunteers, directors, funding bodies – to acknowledge collective, shared and divergent responsibilities. Each participant pledged to share this statement within their own communities, thus aiming to effect change on a national level.[1] Footnotes have been added after the Working Group, to create a further nuanced and fact-based Working Group Statement.

A NEW 'WE'

The group included artists, curators working both independently and employed by institutions, students and researchers, committee members from artist-run initiatives and the director of a membership body. The individual practices in the room were described from

organisational and structural perspectives.

There was a strong awareness that one's practice, be it independent or institutional, always legitimises and supports others' practices, be they institutional, artistic, curatorial or managerial. Thus, we acknowledge that all curatorial work and labour is collaborative, whether it is presented as representing one's self or an organisation. This led to a discussion on how a newly formed 'we' could support others' practices so that they can be more sustainable, both conceptually and practically.

The nature of peership was discussed, in light of the strong professional, as well as informal social networks that exist in the Scottish context. If this networked culture is incorporated into the understanding of practice and infrastructure, it is irrelevant whether a curator works within or outwith an institutional context. Consequently the field would benefit from shedding the language that keeps supporting the notion of an 'us' and a 'them'.



Photo by Ruudu Ulas

THE CONTEXT

It was pointed out that most people in the room would define their practices as operating outside of an art market logic, probably due to the possibilities for practice that arises from publicly funded contexts. Scotland has, in an international context, a heavily publicly supported art field, with one central funding body: Creative Scotland.[2] Practitioners depend on the infrastructural possibilities that arise through this one funder. However, the dispersal of funds through the field is subject to non-transparent processes of internal reviews, rather than transparent peer-review processes. Parallel to this, there is a lack of clarity about the vision or rationale for a future infrastructure. While we rely upon deep reciprocal investment and mutual appreciation to sustain the overlaps in our work, a concern about the overall lack of mobility between communities in the field was voiced, and, by extension, whether we can presume any real form of solidarity exists.

The monolithic funding structure has created an art scene where much of the permanent infrastructure is created and maintained by a core group of institutions. Financial solidarity with freelancers might not in effect be acted out, since institutions are required to cut the cloth according to their own budgets. The experience in the room was that freelance curators find that they receive the best paid work opportunities by direct invitations from artists, rather than institutions.

Curators who are not employed by an institution rely on host funding from festivals and institutions to carry out their practice. Although this host funding is often generous to production, it rarely provides a living wage for the curator.[3] Therefore, curators must act in a self-sacrificing way to make sure that production happens. Often this means that the curatorial voice is only made possible because of a productive form of selfishness,

rather than because it is supported in a monetary way. This 'low pay' and 'no pay' culture permeates all aspects of the sector, with only a handful of employment opportunities for curators in the country.[4] Experience of working between one's own practice and with small organisations is typical in Scotland, where the majority of organisations employ small numbers of staff, with above-average levels of part-time work and almost all fixed-term contracted staff employed on a part-time basis.[5] Even within small teams it is rare to have sole authorship over curatorial activities, and it is normal to undertake a range of roles, with delivery taking precedence over research, reflection or planning.

The Working Group discussed whether it is possible to work as a curator in Scotland, without being employed by an institution, given the current states of institutional practices.

THE QUESTIONS

The Working Group's discussions led to many, as of yet unanswered, questions:

1. How can we change the language that is preventing (or limiting) us from taking responsibility for our practices?

2. Is self-institutionalising indistinguishable from producing a practice? (Meaning: Does complying with structural requirements such as funding bodies' demands mean that your curatorial practice becomes a symptom of these, or is it possible to see structural realities and practice as something separate?)

3. Who is making the project? (Meaning: To what degree do the funding bodies' and institutional collaborators' demands on a curator shift the authorship, and does that matter to a curator's practice?)

4. How open are we really? (Meaning: Does a precarious situation block the possibilities for communities to welcome new voices?)

5. Are we willing to share? (Meaning: Is solidarity possible? Not all participants in the room identified as independent curators, but everyone in the room wants to show solidarity with the challenges that face those who do.)

6. How would we change the structure? (The immediate answer to this question was that there is a need to re-distribute power, and re-introduce peer-review processes.)

7. Do we think our practices are still worth pursuing in the way we do today? (The struggle inflicted on us because of the limited support available led us to a moment of self-critique, questioning the urgencies, methodologies and relevance of our projects or approaches to work.)

THE CONCLUSION

The discussions and still unanswered questions led to some concrete conclusions and calls:

- There is a need to support each other's confidence in dealing with funders and commissioners through public conversation and transparency.
- There was a call for change in hiring policies in institutions. If the sector was open to establish more fixed-term contracts, there would be a more fluid distribution of power.
- There was a call for not undercutting one another in pay negotiations.

- There was a call for the reinstating of a peer-review process for public funding.

OUR COMMITMENT

Because the Working Group at the outset established a 'we', we will work in any way possible through the social and political networks of our profession to reach our goals stated above.







Nana Oforiatta Ayim (left), Jonas Nobel and Markus Degerman of Uglycute (top, right) and Ella Grace McPherson-Newton (MA in Art and Politics student at Goldsmiths University of London) (bottom, right).

1. Although citizens of Scotland are subjects of UK parliamentary rule, a number of powers were devolved to the Scottish parliament in 1999. These include culture, economic development, education and training, environment, health & social care, justice, local government, planning, sport and tourism. Following amendments made to the Scotland Act in 2012 and 2016, further devolved powers include transport, income tax, specific areas of social welfare and VAT receipts. In terms of the infrastructure debated within this Working Group, these policy areas constitute the key aspects that impact on our opportunities for, and influence the methods behind our approaches to work.

2. Public funding for the arts is distributed through a layered structure in the UK, with different arrangements in each country. Here, Creative Scotland is the main body distributing arts grants from Scottish government budgets, alongside Local Authority cultural programmes at regional level, and international work supported through British Council Scotland (est. 1946). Increasingly, links between Creative Scotland and its funded organisations have been consolidated in partnerships with academic institutions. This is unsurprising given the pressures on public funds and the increasing numbers of professional practitioners returning to study or research, especially through funded research programmes. In turn, this narrows the gaps between relationships and governs the type and scope of opportunities made available. The precursor to Creative Scotland, Scottish Arts Council (1994-2010), ran a number of devolved funding streams and small grants to support the emergence of new work in the sector, such as collaborations with a-n (an UK-wide arts advocacy and information organisation), local authorities partnerships that run Visual Artists and Craft Makers Awards, and various international residencies. Creative Scotland's approach to funding has been less nuanced and more managerial, with funds being more clearly linked to strategic government priorities, even though it is an executive non-departmental public body. Residual elements from previous approaches sometimes appear in an ad-hoc manner (there are currently thirteen Local Authority partnerships with Creative Scotland running Visual Artist and Craft Makers Award Schemes, for example) but over time vital strands of 'light-touch' sectorial support – such as ring-fenced funds for organisations run by voluntary committees – have been replaced by one Open Project fund for all art forms.

3. Artists' fees have been articulated through the campaigning and lobbying of organisations such as the Scottish Artists Union (SAU) (see http://www.sau.org.uk/rights/pay/ (accessed 13 July 2018). Although it is stipulated in contracts with Creative Scotland and their devolved funding partners that it is necessary to pay industry fees, the level of project funding available rarely stretches to this in practice. For example, a grant awarded from a festival funded by Creative Scotland might typically be around £3,000 for a curated group exhibition that should be open to the public and free of entry for at least 21 days. This budget should cover all costs, so if all the artists, curators and invigilators are paid by recommended rates there would be barely, if anything left for production, installation, marketing, transport, accommodation and other costs. Subsequent fundraising by the curator(s) is undertaken on a voluntary basis and rarely accounted for, even as in kind support, in the costings of such projects.

4. Artists' fees and payments have been the focus of a number of surveys and research in the UK and Scotland over the past years, including by Artquest (a London-based artists' information organisation), a-n and SAU. Creative Scotland's 2016 study the Visual Arts Sector Review notes that sectorial average earnings are far below the median wage for Scotland and almost half in the case of those who are self-employed.

5. Visual Arts Sector Review (published 2016, Creative Scotland) states: 'the majority of organisations that responded to our survey have 10 or fewer staff and 40% of these have three or fewer staff.'



Artistic Director of DAI Roaming Assembly Gabriëlle Schleijpen welcomes the audience, Sunday 26 November 2017.

Biennials & Guest Work

Towards Transparency

Amsterdam

The Working Group *Biennials & Guest Work* was hosted by the Manifesta Foundation on Monday 26 November 2017.

Convened by Natasha Ginwala, Marieke van Hal and Sabina Sabolović, assisted by Gilda Axelroud and Torill Østby Haaland.

Participants were: Max Bouwhuis, Erdem Çolak, Charles Esche, Katrien Reist-Van Gelder, Nikki Kane, Christina Li, Alan Michelson, Sun A Moon and Zeynep Öz.

We encourage independent research and in-depth reporting on the political economy of biennials, particularly informed by the precarious conditions of the cultural workforce. There is an apparent lack of such reportage on the infrastructural operations of biennial-making, even within the current discourse on contemporary art biennials.

An independent survey should be formulated, that can be circulated among biennial curators and professionals to facilitate a transfer of knowledge on the structural conditions and working policies within biennial organisations. Areas that such a survey could explore include aspects of sponsorship agreements, freedom of speech/censorship, PR agenda, as well as fees and conditions. We propose that such a survey be conducted for past editions as well as current editions on a volunteer and membership basis. In the future, at a more advanced stage, this research would be conducted by or shared with organisations such as the International Biennial Association.

Biennial organisations must take into account a balanced representation of all stakeholders within the

composition of their Board of Management, including artists and curators.

Sharing the budgetary framework of the current biennial edition through the disseminated material on the occasion of the opening (PR material, biennial publication).[1]

To remain proactive in forming collective models for biennial commissions across biennial platforms.[2]

To establish standards on non-exclusive funding, including from foundations and private sources (with nation-specific and regional funds, or support from galleries to be included equally in the general acknowledgements).

Proposal to restructure incoming funding through 5% deduction of budget for major artist commissions to be transferred to general exhibition fund, allocated to support artists without commercial representation.[3]

The shared responsibility of biennial curators to extend curatorial research towards native/first nations/aboriginal artistic practices within the ethical agreement to broaden the impact of indigenous solidarity.[4]

To investigate how a platform can be created premised upon the discussions and concerns evoked through the three-day *Humans of the Institution* gathering in Amsterdam.

To actively initiate mechanisms and examine the forced engagement between private sector funding and biennial organisations, which creates a structural imbalance as well as unreasonable compromises between artistic freedom and curatorial ethics. We have observed a rising tendency in the overdependence on market forces within biennial curating due to the withdrawal or decrease in public funding, which leads us to call for debate and reappraisal in the Netherlands as well as the international context.







Communal dinner Monday 27 November 2017 (top), Niels Van Tomme (Director, De Appel) welcoming all the participants of the Working Groups to De Appel Monday night 27 November 2017 (middle), Ella Grace McPherson-Newton, Ahilapalapa Rands, Michelle Wong and Christina Li (bottom).

1. For reference see the case of the 11th Istanbul Biennial in 2009, What Keeps Mankind Alive?, curated by WHW / What, How & for Whom.

2. See the Liverpool Biennial online: http://www.biennial.com/ (accessed 13 July 2018).

3. Please see alphabetic listing of Contributors, Benefactors, Supporters, Donors and Individual Donors to documenta 14: http://www.documenta14.de/en/supporters (accessed 13 July 2018).

4 Following the recent initiative Indigenous New York, see http://www.veralistcenter.org/engage/exhibition/2020/indigenous-new-york-/ (accessed 13 July 2018).

Boycott & Mobilisation

Amsterdam

The Working Group *Boycott & Mobilisation* was hosted by De Appel on Monday 27 November 2017.

Convened by Joanna Warsza, Lara Khaldi and Rachel O'Reilly, assisted by Eszter Szakács and Hanns Lennart Wiesner.

Participants: Rana Anani, Daisuke Kosugi, Luay Al Derazi, Guus van Engelshoven, Cassius Fadlabi, Ella Grace McPherson-Newton, Fadwa Naamna and Anne Szefer Karlsen.

There are many forms of boycott that in recent years have either crossed over into or taken shape within the context of the art world. Contrary to liberal claims, boycotts open up conversations on complex forces – including definitions and extensions of art itself – instead of, as some claim, shutting down discussion and production.

The workshop raised larger questions about the ways in which contemporary curating and art production cannot continue 'undisturbed', and how to work in an engaged way, knowing that no context is innocent. How does one create or pursue audiences in a place of political non-alignment? How to be more responsible and more responsive? Each case needs to be considered separately.

We asked: What is the legacy of the Cultural Boycott against South Africa?

We started our investigation by taking leave from a discussion of contemporary events of boycotts of specific exhibition infrastructures (e.g. recently the 14th Istanbul Biennial, the 19th Biennale of Sydney,

Manifesta 10 or the 31st Bienal de São Paulo) to consider a more genealogical approach to forms of cultural boycott and their legacies by reading together analyses of the historic thirty-year boycott against South Africa's apartheid regime.

We read the first section of *Assuming Boycott: Resistance, Agency, And Cultural Production* (2017, eds. Kareem Estefan, Carin Kuoni, and Laura Raicovich) dedicated to the South African legacy, and in particular writing by Sean Jacobs, *The Legacy of the Cultural Boycott Against South Africa*. This text reviewed the effects of the politicalisation of cultural industries within a specific resistance project that today may seem to be mediated as simultaneously 'historically sealed', and tactically relevant to an entirely different moment of late-liberal technocapitalism.

Our discussions of contradictions, victories and sacrifices of globalising artistic freedoms – from above and below – as detailed by Jacobs, aided our periodisation of today's boycotts' tarrying with a much more liquid and labour-disidentifying industry. While it was led locally and managed from the 1960s by the ANC, the official instantiation of the international boycott at the request of the interim Indian government in 1946 through the United Nations also provided a reminder of non-aligned solidarities working at the level of governance. Artist and theatre unions played a key role in consolidating aesthetic political discipline of members, while also failing to police cultural producers into singular arguments and positions on boycott itself. The adjudicating force of a 'culture desk' of the ANC, combined with the powerful role of the United Nations explicitly named, re-organised and disciplined the globalising freedoms of artists. To what extent does this set-up compare to today's more decentralised and accelerated digital contagions that pit artistic labour against value-enhancing associations with illiberal professional and infrastructural composure? Interestingly, the myopic coloniality of investments in 'Western culture', from a perceived outpost of it, is what made the cultural boycott against South Africa so powerful a weapon of moral and creative isolation within specifically Anglophone networks of a not yet fully corporatised or digitised culture industry. That this situation exposed the double-bind of the role played by British and American entertainers during peak struggles against racialised governance in Britain and other settler colonies during the same period, was raised by our screening of a YouTube-video featuring aboriginal black power activists in Australia protesting Mandela's 1990 world tour. In this clip, Mandela's 'refusal to intervene' into the affairs of another country whose racialised first nations people had supported ANC's boycotts and planned years of intervention into the affairs of South Africa was highlighted. That boycott is target-attentive and value-projectionist, invested in the unconditional, while being non-transcendental, somehow stands out as the lesson here.

In the question of who boycotts whom, a power relation is already embedded; one that tarries with the real. In relation to the boycott against Israel, for example, the larger possible boycott of America is rarer, although some artists have recently performed it.

We asked: What are the shifts in language, principles and tactics from one geopolitical moment to another, and between differently managed kinds of violence?

What is the need of, and strategic difference between, the boycott of exhibition infrastructure based on the critique of operations of corporations versus 'rogue statehoods', compared to censorship or poor labour practices? Sometimes, when we were thinking of something to boycott we were thinking of something that required ongoing material attention, speech and

critique. Are these the same needs? If not, what is the difference? Why does engaged art need an 'event' in order for committed politics to be fully manifest into practice?

Our inherited modernist models of civil society and free expression were once combined with the agency of waged labour, much more powerfully than they are now, which is non-coincidental. In light of this, we asked whether it is worth considering the new appearances of boycott through not only organised labour, but increasingly precariarised freelance contracts, where artists' shared conditions with other sites of deregulated labour offer unpredictable powers of political alliance – beyond purely contractual norms of divided productivity and 'contaminated' risk management.

We asked: How to maintain the momentum?

The most pressing question around boycott seemed to be less that of what happens after this interregnum, but rather how to maintain it? The problem with boycott campaigns is often that they end with a state of exhaustion. Therefore, cultures of support, critical reproduction and dialogue between professions and disciplines are important, instead of always, or only, speaking to power. As we learnt from the South African model, the network of musicians' and artists' unions abroad made it much more effective when culture becomes an agent of politics, not only a reflection of politics.

There are many ways in which boycotts impact the material production of art as well. Another case we discussed was the boycott of Israeli art material by Palestinian artists at the beginning of the first intifada (the Palestinian popular uprising) in 1987, where a new collective of artists called Towards Experimentation and Creativity emerged. The group had previously

produced didactic political paintings in an attempt to mobilise populations, and when there were calls for the economic boycott of Israeli products the artists suddenly realised they had been using Israeli produced paint and canvas. The change resulted in the most interesting phase of these artists' work, where political experimentation opened an alternative focus on materials of artistic production, which had previously been elided because of the obligation to make politically 'committed art'. Boycott can transform art practices, while sometimes what seems like politically engaged art could actually be relying on and supporting the very infrastructure it boycotts.

Another form of boycott that was discussed, as a specific example of infrastructural proactive mobilising and creating an alternative space of public exhibition, was that of the OFF-Biennale in Budapest, Hungary, which has contributed to fomenting a 'culture of dissent'. The Biennial was started in response to the right-wing government's intervention in public cultural institutions by cultural practitioners. This new biennial does not apply to or accept any direct or indirect funding from governmental organisations. Nonetheless, problems and questions were numerous. For instance, the team was small, underpaid and exhausted. This case brought the discussions into a heightened 'now', where important questions arose: How to support the artists and organisers internationally? Should they accept private funding? Is the biennial enough to mobilise the public?

We asked: How to consider boycotts as a form of mobilisation, not 'quitting'?

Boycotts do make institutions more sensitive, more vulnerable and more apt to change. Therefore, we, art producers as well as representatives of art institutions, should not suppress them, but work seriously through

their claims. They are forms of mobilisation, not a form of 'quitting'. They help cultivate more ethical institutions, and raise questions about double-bind practices in late-liberal capitalism; their explicit fusion, or reading together, of the politics of art with politicisations of culture as activism, calls us to account.





Keynote speakers Ahmed Veriava (top) and Tiziana Terranova (bottom).

Censorship & Strategy

Amsterdam

The Working Group *Censorship & Strategy* was hosted by Framer Framed on Monday 27 November 2017, and its members decided to preserve the divergence and difference of opinions within the conversation to avoid 'censoring'. Under condition of semi-anonymity of a collective text, the following statements were gathered.

"It is good that we are not being live-streamed now.

If we are speaking about censorship, we have to remain anonymous."

THE MEANING OF CENSORSHIP

The meaning of exhibiting has changed.

We are now in a critical moment. Mere exposition is an irresponsible strategy. You can bring people in danger as a curator. It is utterly naïve to think that showing material is a critical gesture in itself.

I was never told why they decided to cancel the exhibition. I was asked to comply with their decision. And they never wrote to the artists with an explanation. In the end, there was no trace on their website either. It was as if the show was never even planned.

Censorship is sometimes presented as an attack on the right of self-expression as understood in the context of 'human rights'. In reality, even under twentieth-century European totalitarianisms, censorship was not about production of works but about their distribution. If it is

an issue of freedom of speech, then the political dimension of the figure of curator is crucial on account of the significance of distribution.

Is the rejection of an artwork or curatorial project necessarily censorship?

Making a choice is not censorship.

How do you recognise censorship? What I encounter in my practice can be called soft censorship.

Funding might be a tool of censorship as well. Especially the cutting of it.

People say, ‘this was a bad art work anyway, so what if it has been censored?’, but the perceived quality of a work should not be a factor.

Facebook algorithms are also censoring images. If the images are dark and with texts, they will be suppressed within the newsfeed.

The idea that whatever an artist produces has a sacred value and that a curator has to expose it in public space whatever it takes, is wrong. It is a myth from which the whole romanticism of censorship emerges.

The Thorbecke principle implies that the state in the Netherlands should refrain from making an artistic judgement on cultural expressions. But it also works the other way around, blocking the political agency of art.

The West does not accept that Western dichotomies are being challenged, and the points of view coming from the East are being censored.

Our task is to conceal political speech as art. We did it in Eastern Europe for decades, and now the West is learning from us.

SELF-CENSORSHIP

The main question one must ask oneself is: what do you want to achieve, as a curator?

It is self-censorship that we have to talk about. How do we decide not to exhibit works, or how does society ask us not to?

Sometimes it is necessary to censor ourselves, to change our own language if we want to be understandable to broader circles of workers, to trade unions.

I would defend transparency. If showing a painting generates a harsh discussion, this is already a positive result. People have a right to know.

I would have exhibited Dana Schutz’s painting – within the context of the 2017 Whitney Biennial – but would try to organise a discussion around it, with activists let’s say. Discussions are our only weapon. But am I the only one who has a feeling this weapon does not work anymore?

To create a discursive context around a work is not enough.

We remain in our own circles. Why would activists trust us? It takes years to gain their trust. We have to move out of our comfort zone, the circles we remain in very safely. The tool of discussion is not meaningful in situations of conflict. Let us create another kind of alliances. But it will never happen if you keep travelling to New York. You have to persist for fifty years, and then you will be able to change things in the com-







Katia Krupennikova, Yumi Maes (Frontier Imaginaries) and speaker Rachel O'Reilly (top). Speakers Alan Michelson and Nana Oforiatta Ayim (middle). Delegate Katrien Reist-Van Gelder, suported by Netwerk Aalst (bottom).







Speaker Imara Limon (top), Eszter Szakács (MA Curatorial Practice, UiB) (middle), Alba Colomo (bottom).

munity. In order to do that you should abandon the modernist toolbox of contemporary art.

I would never have exhibited Dana Schutz's painting, because I would never have accepted to be a curator in a context I do not belong to and do not know.

I would not underestimate the positive effect of self-censorship as a conscious withdrawal of artworks from a public sphere. It is a powerful gesture.

LOCALITY

Is suppressing work that is hurtful to certain communities censorship, or could it build solidarity with existing local struggles? The global context is not everywhere. We cannot hop from one space to another. We have to know a local context and its sensibilities.

But does this create an argument against the possibility of curating in an international context, against travelling curators and independent curators that many of us are? It sounds to me like blaming the 'rootless'.

Is it possible to curate outside of contexts that you are familiar with? Can transcontextual solidarity be a basis for curatorial work?

I might have been naïve. And I also do not know what I would have done if I would be a local and not an international curator with a passport from a different country.

'The local' is full of non-local protagonists anyway.

PUBLIC/PRIVATE INTEREST

Where is a curator's loyalty? With artists, with audiences, with institutions? With sponsors? Is there such a thing as 'public interest' that asks one not to exhibit a work?

Censorship exists in bodies of power. Communities and publics can express their needs and demands, but it is hard to argue that they 'censor'.

Twentieth-century European totalitarian censorship also operated with a notion of public interest. Paintings and novels were censored not because of a dictator's folly, but because it was believed they were hurtful and offensive. And they were still accessible to specialists, in many cases.

How would you as a curator work with a private bank anyway? What did you expect? You should see through what power structures are behind an institution.

AVOIDING CENSORSHIP

We must divide the discourse of censorship from the discourse of victimisation. There is no merit in being censored.

I once saw a video at the Moscow Biennial with a graphic description of a homosexual love act as the soundtrack. If there had been a Russian translation in addition to the English, it would have been censored. If art remains in an incomprehensible language, it is in less danger of being censored... Art has used this strategy for a long time, but when you are closer to realistic representation, you are closer to censorship.

When an artist has been censored by an institution because of popular demand, it is the curator who lost their negotiation within the public sphere as they did not position themselves well enough.

There is no sense in silly provocation. We have to cut

ties with how the avant-garde tradition understood this methodology. The avant-garde just took military or revolutionary tools and transferred them into art practice.

Artistic/curatorial practice is not just a matter of showing or not showing. There are many ways to show and see work.





Communal lunch time, from left speaker Charles Esche, Natalie Hope O'Donnell (Working Group Convener, Oslo), Tove Aadland Sørvåg (MA Curatorial Practice, UiB), Miriam Wistreich (De Appel Curatorial Programme participant), curator Vivian Ziherl and speaker Heejin Kim (top). From left, Aaron Schuster, Katia Krupennikova (Working Group Convener, Amsterdam) and speaker Nana Oforiatta Ayim (bottom).





Speaker Antonia Majaca (left) responding to Rick Herron (MA Curatorial Practice, UiB) (right) after her position paper Sunday 26 November 2017.

Archives & Individuals

Some working notes on engaging with archives in an afternoon

Amsterdam

The Working Group *Archives & Individuals* was hosted by the New Urban Collective on Monday 27 November 2017.

Convened by Michelle Wong, Christiane Berndes and Steven ten Thije, assisted by Tatiana Lozano and Jepkorir Rose Kiptum.

Participants were: Hernán Barón, Nell Donkers, Mitchell Esajas, Ina Hagen, Jagna Lewandowska, Karima Boudou Mzouar, Ong Jo-Lene, Petra Ponte, Ahilapalapa Rands, Randi Thommessen and Ana Bigotte Vieira.

These notes were developed collectively from an afternoon of discussion around '10 Theses on the Archive', freely available and accessible here. The notes draw on the Working Group participants' and its convenors' experiences of working with museums, and in personal as well as institutional archival collections.

1. When you engage with an archive, ask yourself who is speaking, who is not speaking, and who is being spoken about (consider the frictions).

2. Depending on the time and space you are in, you may be a builder, a caretaker, or the user of an archive. Be open to being all three at the same time.

3. As caretaker of an archive, establish a set of foundational principles and then return to them, often.

4. Establish a set of questions to turn to, to reconcile instances where the desires, definitions and values of the individual (builder) is not in aligment with that of the institution (caretaker), and vice versa.

5. Be sensitive and expand your sensibilities while

working on an archive.

6. Each archive involves a debatable starting point; each account of art historical facts and narratives create the possibilities for yet other ones.

7. Be aware of one's position and disposition towards the archive.

8. Taking responsibility for an archive as a user, builder or caretaker suggests that one becomes accountable for one's actions within the archive – it becomes one's duty to do something with or to the archive. Is (not-) responding also a way of taking responsibility?

9. If relevant, declare your emotional relationship to the archival material.

10. In case you use the archive as a dynamic tool to challenge the past in order to create a perspective on the future, don't forget to mention who is speaking.

11. Change the notion of intellectual property into intellectual propriety. The way we approach, use and share archival materials will affect how those around us work with theirs. An archive that is generous in providing access and information, and is transparent about its absences, will invite generative discussions that may not only fill the gaps in its collection but extend beyond its own remit.

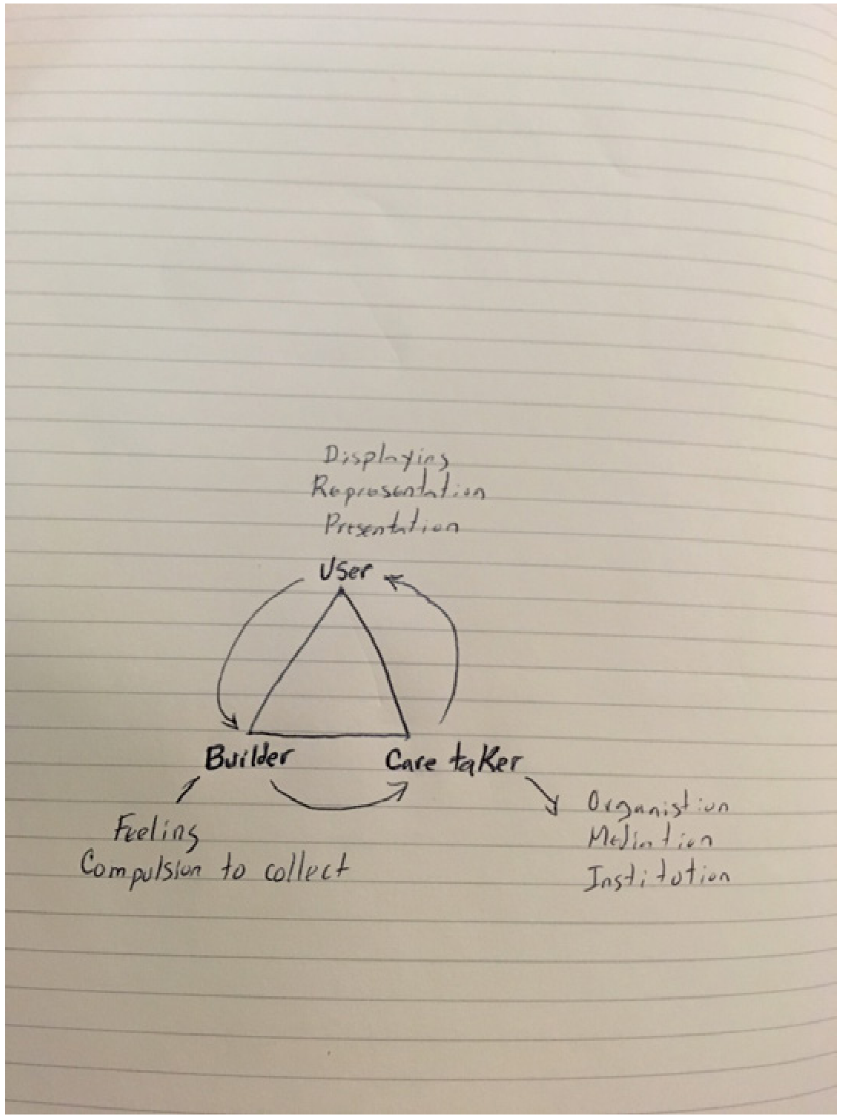
12. As builders, caretakers and users of archives we make materials available to others, because we imagine that they might be able to see what we are not able to see now.

13. It seems important to approach an archive with sensitivity to what it contains (and leaves out). One should always allow oneself to be affected by the encounter with what the archive holds. The response to that affective encounter, however, should be considered in relation to the larger context of why and for whom one engages with the archive. One should remain open to the possibility that one perhaps should not extract narratives from the archive at all, and instead take on the role of its caretaker.

14. Archives seen as a set of practices are always conjugated in the present, therefore declined in several modalities, according to each specific situation. Nonetheless we could find some common questions:

a. On support: what are the actual supports of the archive (which media, artefacts and procedures do archives embody) and what does the archive aim to support?

b. On access: what architectures of access do archives display (what practices, gestures, choreographies do they activate) and what systems of knowledge are required to access them?



Notebook drawing by Hernán Barón









Delegates Benjamin Fallon and Sarah MacIntyre, supported by Creative Scotland in partnership with Scottish Contemporary Art Network (SCAN) (top left), delegate Taylor Le Melle, supported by Netwerk Aalst (bottom, left), speaker Manuela Moscoso (top, right) and delegate Sharelly Emanuelson, supported by Frans Hals Museum | De Hallen Haarlem (bottom, right).

Curating & Ethics

Oslo

The Affiliated Working Group *Curating & Ethics* was hosted by PRAKSIS, Oslo on Tuesday 28 November 2017.

Convened by by Natasha Marie Llorens, Nicolas Jones and Natalie Hope O'Donnell.

Collectively authored by Rodrigo Ghattas, Ina Hagen, Jasmine Hinks, Maria Jonsson, Natasha Marie Llorens, Michael McLoughlin, Maija Rudovska and Helle Siljeholm, edited by Anne Szefer Karlsen and Vivian Ziherl.

This text was jointly authored and evolved from a collective process of thinking and doing as part of the month-long residency *Curating the Social*: *Meet me at the Empty Centre* at PRAKSIS, Oslo. The residency aimed to explore the discourse around curating social practice, looking specifically at the ethical questions that arise in doing such curatorial work.

The text engages with three key questions, and its foot-notes offer a score for the production of a grounding for sensitivity.

1. What does it mean to 'do good' in the art world, and is this different from 'being ethical'?

2. At what scale does the ethical dimension of art become a curatorial responsibility? At the level of infrastructure and funding schemes? In decisions around documentation? In concerns around audience participation and inclusion?

3. Do the ethics of a socially engaged art work also manifest themselves within the work itself, and how is the curator implicated?

In order to try to think and act otherwise, we understand our own positions as bearers of the colonial body. The voice of the group does not always present consensus. Our capacity to feel is shaped and conditioned by how the body has previously been addressed. This emphasises the responsibility to handle our and other bodies with care and empathy.[1] Ethics should be approached

1. * **Emphasise** the instruction that *addresses* the condition.
** Question if you **care**, and how.

from this embodied position. How do you take care of people in such a way that they can disagree?[2]

2. * **Take care** of your **present voice**.
** **Present** difficult ideas to the audience.

What does it mean to 'do good' in the art world, and is this different from 'being ethical'?

'Doing good' seems to be imagined as being about following rules, such as those of the Church, colonialism and capitalism. This induces working conditions defined by neoliberalism, bolstered by artworld nepotism. We inhabit ossified institutions, governmental and abstract institutional structures that determine these rules. In this light, 'doing good' also assumes a linear understanding of the world conveyed through a top-down structure.[3]

3. * **Exist** for three hours in a room with oranges and two dogs. Then *describe* what happened.
** **Respond** to a random conversation on the street.

'Doing good' from a position of institutional power is therefore by definition problematic. Any action within this economy privileges the position of the institutional protagonist and their 'goodness'. 'Being good' in this institutional paradigm is ultimately motivated by a desire to touch 'other' people from that 'good' position, in order to lift, or enlighten, or make others' lives 'better'.[4] This

4. * Find a **position** on the floor.
** **Lift** yourself up using just your skin.

kind of moralism objectifies those who are the subject of this 'good' intention. This paradigm also assumes a preliminary innocence, and displaces the responsibility for defining care onto the superstructure – be they a nation, a state, a father, a philosopher, a god.

The Working Group proposes that being ethical involves taking the risk of working beyond institutional norms and support sturctures. Curatorial ethics is therefore the process of producing relationships in which participants are not objectified as receipients. This position requires institutional curators within Euro-Anglo settings to recognise themselves as colonial bodies, bearers of that violent legacy. This means taking on the responsibility for defining care in relationships at the scale of the individual encounter, or the encounter within any curatorial project. This kind of responsibility requires training and recognition as a specific knowledge and skill set.[5]

5. * When you are embarrassed, take a **risk**.
** **Train** yourself to *listen* to others.

At what scale does the ethical dimension of art become a curatorial responsibility? At the level of infrastructure and funding schemas? In decisions around documentation? In concerns around audience participation and inclusion?

The Working Group members work with different scales for different projects, one-to-one, with specific groups or audiences. Scale also entails the element of time when focusing on the ethical dimension of art. The Working Group proposes that curators should keep the scale of their projects specific to the contexts they work in. Our discussions led us to conclude that the curator should immerse, not invade. Ownership of the curatorial project has to be shared, be hosted and un-hosted at the same time.[6]

6. * Develop the **scale** for your own composition!
** Don't use a **telescope, immerse yourself**.

The dialogue around ethics and curatorial responsibility often gets lost in the space between art practice ethics – such as making work in a social context – and

institutional ethics – such as corporate or other governance principles. We think this 'space' should be discussed more, *mainly* because this area is often not transparent; it shifts, it changes and is harder to define. It is clear to us that it is at the intersection between art making, curatorial practice, audience participation, institutional working methods, participant relations, marketing, planning and long-/short-term questions that the ethical plays out.[7]

7. * **Get lost** right now!
** **Discuss** who will take care of the documentation, and for how long they will care for these sounds and images.

What defines ethics itself? Is it when something challenges your concept of what you know is right or not? Who is forming it, who is shaping it?[8] Who are the actors involved, who *does* it?

8. * Choose the **form** of your resistance.
** Unknow the shapes you **know**.

Presentation of documentation – a recording – implicates the artist, the curator, the parties to be recorded, the institution the documentation is sited in and everyone around, between and in any way connected to the recorded.[9]

9. * **Implicate** the person sitting next to you in your current musical decisions.
** **Site** an object, make a map and give it to someone to find it.

The recording as a document holds the people recorded accountable to their words – the image it creates, as well as the care that needs to be taken in the process of documentation. How does a recording implicate a listener? Who is the recording made for and with what intention? This needs to be stated ahead of the moment of documentation. The document makes visible how an encounter and its documentation operate in very different ways in the different contexts in which they are circulated in – as evidence, as image, as memory, etc. This constitutes 'the telescope effect'.[10]

10. * Find another body. **Create** a **telescope** effect.
** Zoom in on how things **operate**.

Do the ethics of a socially engaged art work also manifest themselves within the work itself and how is the curator implicated?

Questions of ethics are embedded within the actions of the everyday and they condition relations between individuals. Ethics are therefore also embedded within and embodied by the artwork, and are played out through the processes and gestures which occur within and around the work.[11]

11. * **Play out** the situation.
** **Embed** in your memory the first fifty phone numbers in your phone, call all of them without using your phonebook.

The ethical questions within a socially engaged art work are made evident through the image it makes of the world, and through how the work addresses its subjects and objects. In turn, the ethics of the address structures the audiences' relations to the work. The artwork can provoke a discussion, from which questions arise regarding the framing of and address towards difference.[12]

12. * Share your **address** with the next person you are meeting.
** Find a **structure** to destabilise.

Controversial artworks can initiate questions such as: Who is the work made for? Who are its audiences? If it is produced for the benefit of an art audience, at what – or whose – cost? How do we justify the provocation's impact on those implicated in its making?[13]

13. * **Acknowledge** that which you find difficult.
** **Initiate questions, acknowledge** your mistakes.

The construction of difference is structural and systemic and requires an acknowledgement of the multiple layers within the image made of the other *by* the artwork.

We think that the curator is implicated in the ethical consequences by way of the decisions made in how to position the work, through being accountable for the choices they make in framing the work through text, context and in giving a platform that exposes the work

and the picture it makes of the world.[14]

14. * **Position** your body so you can **expose** the **platform**.
** **Frame** your own privilege for the others in the room.

However, the way in which the curator is involved in, and responsible for, the ethical implications of the work differs from work to work. Within social practice, the very position of the curator may not exist in an explicit role, but is embedded through 'the curatorial', through the artist(s), facilitator(s), or other agents who take responsibility for the ethical consequences of the work.[15]

15. * **Differ.**
** **Take** an inventory of collective resources.

The impossibility of knowing what will happen as a result of an artwork becoming public means that risks are involved – neither the artist nor the curator can fully know what will happen during an encounter. Being open to being wrong or doing wrong in a collaboration is necessary.

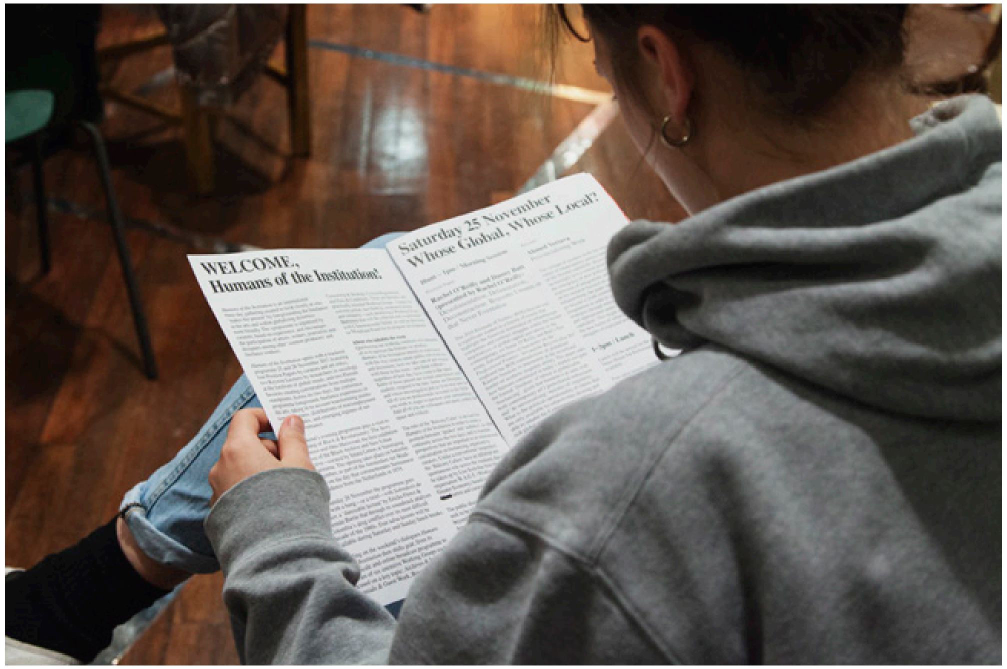
Therefore, care must be taken when positioning the encounter.[16]

16. * Move from your bones. **Risk** your **encounter**.
** **Position the encounter** with the Other that you feel the most distant with.

A significant consideration for the curator must be how to foster a situation where there is something at stake, whether this is in the possibility to voice dissensus, or to be vulnerable. The curator's responsibility is not to ensure a frictionless and safe encounter of an artwork, but to take care of the rupture caused by it.[17]

17. * **Be vulnerable** when the **rupture** is taking place.
** Individually **voice** consensus.





Lua Vollaard (Project manager, Frontier Imaginaries) welcoming the audience and registering them for the Working Groups (top), and audience member reading the programme (bottom).









In preparation for Ericka Florez and Hernán Barón's danceable lecture *Sobredosis de amor*, salsa lessons were provided by Jorge Suarez from Swing Latino during the lunch hours of Saturday 25 November and Sunday 26 November 2017 at Veem House for Performance.

Art Education & the Romance of the Studio

Montevideo

The Affiliated Working Group *Art Education & the Romance of the Studio* was hosted by Instituto Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes (IENBA), Montevideo on 27 November 2017.

Convened by Ana Laura López de la Torre.

Participants were: lecturers and assistant lecturers from IENBA and Facultad de Arquitectura, some of whom hold positions in the management bodies of their Faculties, students enrolled in different programmes of study and year levels, and the curator from a leading art organisation, not related to the University.



Photo by Ana Laura López de la Torre

On Monday 27 November 2017, I convened an Affiliated Working Group in one of the rooms allocated to become a new teaching space I will soon be opening at the Instituto Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, Universidad de la República, Montevideo.

I invited students, staffs and contacts from the local art scene to drop in throughout the morning to converse about higher art education in Uruguay, and how it relates or respond to discursive trends in the contemporary art world, especially those addressed by *Humans of the Institution*.

Under the title *Art Education & the Romance of the Studio* we held an open conversation with a trigger invitation: to bring and share objects, images, ideas and practices that were thought necessary by the participants to build an art teaching space, so that – quoting Allan Kaprow – it connects and takes advantage of the endless availability of the rest of the world.[1]

Over a period of three hours, a heterogeneous group of people came together, some stayed throughout, others came in and joined the ongoing conversation, diverting and branching out on the themes and topics under discussion. We wrote down notes under four headings: 'Things'; 'Texts and Authors'; 'Spaces and Times'; 'Practices, Knowledge, Competences'. Below are the notes compiled from what in fact was a free-flowing stream of conversation, from which I have left out the extensive anecdotal talk that often characterises our efforts to think together.

THINGS... SOME WERE ACTUALLY BROUGHT IN AS GIFTS FOR THE NEW SPACE

We discussed approaches to accessing and taking care of a space of this nature – a space that works both as an educational and closed space, as well as a public and open space. The list below gathers the things that were considered the basic tools and resources needed for a contemporary art workspace, underscoring its definition as a space for social interaction and communication, with basic technical infrastructure for presentations and small-scale publishing, equipped for hospitality and gatherings, connected to the outside world via the web.

A bottle of wine
Mate, tea, coffee
Cups, a kettle
Feminist chopping board
Knives, scissors, cutters
A guillotine
Metal ruler and cutting mat
A music system
Computer, printer, projector
Wi-Fi
Giant flash drive
Platforms for communication:
Facebook and a notice-/whiteboard
Address book/Contact list

TEXTS AND AUTHORS...

We talked about the shortage of dedicated spaces and times for collective reading and discussion of key theoretical contemporary texts in our context. Philosophy, in particular aesthetics, is the discipline most commonly thought to underpin discussions about art. However, in the imaginary of younger people, wider theoretical concerns appear that are related to the emergence of new forms of practice. We compiled the beginning of a reading list relevant to those in the room:

- *Publicación Especulacciones: acciones vinculadas al proyectar,* by Atxu Amann and Guillermo Pardo
- *Artificial Hells. Participatory art and the politics of the spectatorship*, by Claire Bishop
- *Politics in a Glass Case, Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions*, by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry

- *Situation, Documents of Contemporary Art*, by Claire Doherty
- *Community Aesthetics*, by Julia Gallagher
- *Estética de la emergencia: la formación de otra cultura de las artes*, by Reinaldo Laddaga
- *The Red and the Black*, by Stendhal
- *The Loneliness of the Project*, by Boris Groys
- *About the New,* by Boris Groys
- *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, by Jacques Rancière
- *Textos de Estética y Teoría del Arte*, by Sánchez Vázquez
- *One Place after another. Site-specific and locational identity*, by Miwon Kwon
- *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, by Susan Lacy
- *Six years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972,* by Lucy Lippard
- *A Global Sense of Place*, by Doreen Massey
- *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*, by Angela McRobbie
- *Art and its institutions. Current conflicts, critique and collaborations*, by Nina Möntmann
- *Cuestiones de Arte contemporáneo. Madrid: Emecé and Estética. La cuestión del arte, Buenos Aires: Emecé*, by Elena Oliveras
- *ARTE CONCEPTUAL, INSTALACIÓN Y PERFORMANCE: Un estudio discursivo de las prácticas docentes sobre las Prácticas Artísticas Contemporáneas en la Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes (1985–1993)*, by Magalí Pastorino
- *Diálogos latinoamericanos en las fronteras del art and La crítica feminista como modelo de crítica cultural*, by Nelly Richar
- *El arte como herramienta de transformación social: proyectos comunitarios*, by Arlene Suess, Gianni Vattimo, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard
- *Reboot: Dos lecciones de Arquitectura*, Catalogue of National Participation at the Venice Biennale of Arquitecture. The two lessons are: We exhibit constructions not buildings, and; We present intangibles not objects.
- Report from research project mapping professional trajectories of graduate students from IENBA.

SPACES AND TIMES...

For cultural theory and critical thinking
Space for collective/conversational use
Space with big tables to work – co-working studio example
Extension and outreach in spaces of real social interest
More compromise
More proactivity

PRACTICES, KNOWLEDGE, COMPETENCES...

Collective
Contextualised
Interdisciplinary
Discursive production in relation to outreach and extension practice
Practices that help the crossing between unconnected spaces
Positioning in relation to political ideas about the role of art
Practices from the past, re-signified for today
Drawing
Meditation/Yoga
Art history and art theory
Confidence in the students
Proactivity
Relations with digital technology
Teacher evaluation
Internal and external communication
Knowledge of academic structures
Skills for advanced academic work
How to manage learning in large,

heterogeneous groups of students
Teaching planning
Use of online teaching platforms beyond their use to share documents
Meetings
Well-organised courses and classes, non-repetitive, planned
Oriented towards professional practice

Particularly among students and younger lecturers there was a clear sense that art education should do a lot more than what was on offer now. Specifically in relation to the question posed by the organisers of *Humans of the Institution*, we discussed the status of curatorial practice in our context, where the lack of formal training for curators places the necessity to integrate curatorial skills within art practice education. Within IENBA, curatorial discourse and practices are brought in ad hoc, by lecturers interested in fostering students' operative knowledge of the mediation practices needed to design and carry out public art projects within the school context, where students take responsibility for the production and contextualisation of their work. It is deemed a necessity that artists develop some curatorial competences to be able to sustain independent practices in a context where institutional opportunities to showcase or produce work are scarce.

Later, on the same day, during an event where students' work produced as part of the *Bienal Sur 2017* was shown in the foyer of IENBA, an offset printed poster was handed out that perfectly summed up the collective feelings in the Montevideo contemporary art scene at the moment.

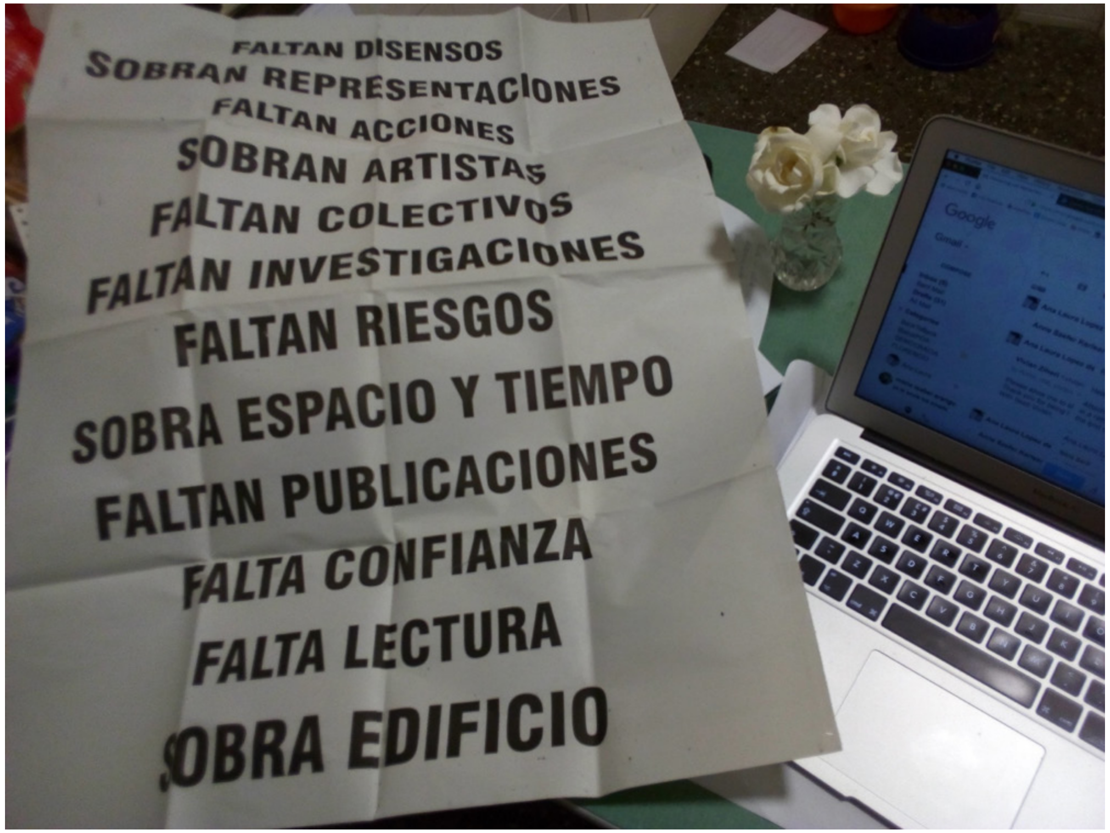


Photo by Ana Laura López de la Torre

Not enough dissent
Too many representations
Not enough actions
Too many artists
Not enough collectives
Not enough research
Not enough risk
Too much space and time
Not enough publications
Not enough confidence
Not enough reading
Too much space in the art school building

1. Alan Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environ ments & Happenings* (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 1956).





Communal lunch and dinner were provided by Ramenas and De 6 Linden Saturday 25 November and Sunday 26 November 2017 at Veem House for Performance.





Curator Anne Szefer Karlsen introducing the plenum *Whose Global, Whose Local?*, Saturday 25 November 2017 (top). Speaker Charles Esche (bottom).

Afterword

Anne Szefer Karlsen and Vivian Ziherl

The following text offers further information and some reflections on the public proceedings of *Humans of the Institution*, videos of which can be found online. These proceedings could not have happened without the support of Dutch Art Institute Roaming Assembly and Veem House for Performance, Amsterdam Art Weekend, and De Appel.

The agenda that drove *Humans of the Institution* was the wish to discuss the working conditions experienced by freelance curators, with the explicit aim of affecting so-called 'industry standards'. This immediately drew the programme towards important questions regarding the basis of the organisation of labour in the present time, as many freelance curators work across national boundaries and global regions, as well as in both private and public arts sectors.

Starting from data available in the Netherlands, the significant growth of the amount of freelancers in the cultural sector was a chief finding of the survey across the cultural sector, titled *Valuing Passion*, conducted by the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER) and the Council for Culture, published in January 2017.[1] The report noted that in the 2009–2013 period, the number of freelancers in the cultural sector increased by 20.4%, much more than in the economy as a whole (9.6%). Meanwhile, there is a correspondence between globalisation and the rise of the freelance career which is written into the current Dutch immigration Department's (IND) artist's residence permit. This stipulates that the foreign cultural worker must work exclusively on a 'zelfstandinge basis' (work as a self-employed person), and that waged employment will cause the permit to be forfeited.

The parallel process of The Norwegian Association

of Curators mapping the working conditions of their members to create a national overview was valuable in the lead up to *Humans of the Institution*. They found that 71% of the curators who responded to the questionnaire have had commissions and worked for 'clients' abroad in the last five years, while 92% of the institutions which responded have used the services of freelance curators between 2012 and 2016. In addition, 46% of the curators who responded revealed they have accepted to work on something without remuneration over the last five years.[2] This data further amplified the urgency to dicuss freelance experiences of both local and international project labour and the social and infrastructural spaces that surround us, and that we share with colleagues and communities implied in the projects we take on.

Humans of the Institution was created to look closely at who 'makes the present' by foregrounding the freelancer – in the arts and within globalising dynamics at large. The weekend programme was created to explore nuances, to tease out dilemmas and to spark debate. The Saturday carried the title *Whose Global,* Whose Local?, and the question asked on this day was: What forms of social or cultural consciousness, and organising, can bridge these contradictions long enough to effect change in 'industry standards' in contemporary art, and further afield? The Sunday carried the title *Precarious Practices*, and the questions asked were: How do both freelancers and institutions negotiate their interdependence? How do we go about the precariousness of curators and institutions not yet constituted?

By the end of the programme, a number of immediate outcomes were apparent. For example, the benefit of bringing together members from existing umbrella organisations representings artists, curators and art-workers was very clear: they included Platform BK (Netherlands), Norwegian Association of Curators, Chapter Thirteen (Scotland), W.A.G.E. (USA) and JUBILEE (Belgium). It was also clear that substantial exchanges were underway among participants from locations including Aotearoa/New Zealand, Ghana, Palestine, Turkey, Curaçao, South Africa, Ecuador, and many others.

THE MATERIAL CONDITIONS OF *HUMANS OF THE INSTITUTION*

Humans of the Institution was conceived and co-organised by art and research foundation Frontier Imaginaries and Curatorial Practice, Faculty of Fine Art, Music and Design, University of Bergen. It was hosted by the Veem House for Performance and co-presented with the Dutch Art Institute and Amsterdam Art Weekend. Bringing together a strong local network, Humans of the Institution's Working Groups were supported by local organisations De Appel, New Urban Collective/ the Black Archive, Framer Framed, Frans Hals Museum | De Hallen Haarlem, Manifesta Foundation and the Stedelijk Museum. The project was also made possible through the generous support of the Mondriaan Fund, the Amsterdam Fonds voor de Kunst and the University of Bergen.

Humans of the Institution opened with a weekend programme on 25 and 26 November 2017 at the Veem House for Performance, Amsterdam. Four Position Papers by curators and art critics, two Keynote Lectures by researchers in sociology at the forefront of global trends, and two Plenary Sessions created a structure for a large-scale conversation between the roughly 150 people in the room. To create a position between 'speaker' and 'audience' the role of the 'Balcony Caller' was devised to offer continuity across the two days, to enable a broad participation from the room, and to give a mandate to perspectives that are important to an

international conversation on freelancing, organised by curators. Unlike a conventional 'respondent' in a regular conference, the 'Balcony Callers' had an informal and spontaneous role across the weekend, taken up by Hawaiian/Fijian/Pākehā artist and curator Ahilapalapa Rands, as well as Lise Soskolne from the artists' organisation W.A.G.E. (Working Artists and the Greater Economy).

We wanted to experiment with the spatial conventions of conference settings and invited Uglycute – an architecture and design company run by artists on equal footing as architects and interior designers, and with customers today ranging from global clothes retailers to intimate local wine bars in Stockholm, where they live – to create the spatial design at Veem House for Performance. Uglycute started out in the early 2000s and are the contemporaries of a big wave of freelance curators. They have contributed to several landmark projects, one of which was *Utopia Station*, for La biennale di Venezia in 2003; curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Molly Nesbitt and Rikrit Tiravanija. In many ways, one can argue that they have worked in ways similar to freelance curators. They created a landscape of different types of chairs placed on a silver grid. The diversity of the chairs provided a contrast to the rigid grid system. Since the focus point in the room changed during the two-day conference, those in the room were encouraged to move and turn their chair, thus breaking the so-called 'logic' of the grid. The pattern of the grid was there to remind us all of the importance of making new patterns and/or to remind us that patterns are important parts of a working society. Screens in three directions informed us about what was happening and gave the space several identical focus points. About this particular space Uglycute say that they wanted to 'convert the room from a theatre for monologues to a space of dialogue'.

As curators and moderators of the programme we provided time for pauses, reflections, exchanges and debates between each segment of the programme, teasing out multiple standpoints that together generated a live stream and a comprehensive online video archive produced by the DigUiB Learning and Communication Lab at the University of Bergen. The collaboration with the 'Learning Lab' was brokered so the public discussions could be made relevant and available beyond the room in which they took place in Amsterdam.

HUMAN INFRASTRUCTURES

Freelancers often negotiate a structure of work in which their personal network and cultural status are perpetually trading for specific contracts and monetary values. This is often based upon a premise of labour, but clearly exceeds that category to the extent that freelance curators may be said to do business in the marketplace of 'human capital'.

In his keynote on the opening day of the programme, Ahmed Veriava, researcher at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg introduced the notion of 'people as infrastructure' through his detailed and compelling account of the struggle against the privatisation of water utilities within Johannesburg. The notion of people as infrastructure proved to be a useful, and an often cited term throughout the dialogues that were part of Humans of the Institution. Perhaps this is – in part – because it offers a framework through which to recognise the agency of those who work on a freelance basis. While it is true that many freelance curators might prefer to have the income stability and material infrastructures of institutional jobs, freelancing may also be seen as an active choice that many curators have taken in the light of the ethical questions posed by the institutional

workplace amid neoliberalising conditions. Perhaps some freelancers are freelancers – in part – because they would rather compromise their income stability than their accountability to others in the field, their accountability to intellectual and ethical projects, or to broader transformative agendas. This insight may also be aligned with the clearly disproportionate number of women who work as freelancers at various stages of their careers.

CONDITIONS ON THE GROUND

The notion of 'conditions on the ground' became another watchword used throughout the conversations of *Humans of the Institution*. This first arose in the programme's opening Position Paper by Rachel O'Reilly and Danny Butt on the topic of boycott as a tactic, based on the events surrounding the 2014 Biennale of Sydney and its sponsorship by Transfield Services. In the conversation that followed, O'Reilly pointed out that the fantasy of non-collective undertakings of the freelance curator is indeed bound by the material weave that make any curatorial project in fact a collective operation. However, the consequences of the collective are rarely identical to the initial curatorial intention. The most relevant question today is, then, how to be invested in those conditions on the ground, how to be intersubjectively responsible, and how to occupy the antagonism around questions of value, as well as permanently confront curatorial production with itself.

The phrase continued to pop up in situations where a certain complexity of locatedness was needed in order to articulate the structure of obligations that curators end up having to negotiate. For example, in the original case the 'conditions on the ground' in Sydney included a deep obligation to people held in offshore detention by the Australian government, and in camps operated





Position Papers, Saturday 25 November 2017, Rachel O'Reilly, presenting paper co-written with Danny Butt, (top) and Despina Zefkili (bottom).

at the time by Transfield Services. Another example was the work of Nana Oforiatta Ayim, who presented work guided by a need to devise curatorial models relative to the needs of cultural work in Ghana and where 'conditions on the groud' included an Accra neighbourhood, a nearby primary school, cultural festivals, and long existing arts and cultural practices.

In a connected, and yet different, way specific trans-local conversations emerged that held particular significance. For example, Sabina Sabalović of the Zagreb-based collective WHW responded with particular intensity to the presentation of Athens-based critic Despina Zefkili in which she critiqued the exploitative framing of Athens as a location rich in a certain 'dynamic' opportunity. For Sabalović, this recalled discourses that had surrounded the Eastern Bloc during the 1990s, a time of integration that has proven not to be beneficial for those working locally. In light of this, the value of discussing 'conditions on the ground' in this way is to develop a critique of the existing geographies of art markets and cultural geopolitics, where the curatorial production of 'counter-geographies' may serve to contest the 'facts of the world' as they stand at present.

THE POLITICS OF THE ROOM

The ongoing significance of dialogues that address the yet-to-be-dismantled apparatuses of colonial power in the arts, and within the global distribution of goods and harms at large, was clearly in evidence during *Humans of the Institution*. In gathering a highly international group of participants in Amsterdam – in the 'houthavens' area, where the wood brought to the Netherlands in the spice and textile trade was stockpiled – an ongoing colonial politics was not so much present in the room as in the very walls themselves.

The depth of both the violence and the institutionalised denial of colonial practices can mean that conversations that address the ongoing realities of colonialism in the present become charged and sensitive conversations. They are conversations that must take place because their repression would be a perpetuation of the colonial apparatus. This poses substantial challenges to participants and moderators of a programme such as this, aiming to stage a conversation that is honest and uncensored, but that does not produce unnecessary or unproductive rifts.

Here the significance of 'people as infrastructure' became even more relevant – begging the question whether a space of dialogue can be established that is adequate to support the depth and potential difficulty of a conversation in the wake of colonial processes, violence, and anti-colonial obligations. How has the power of authority been established? How is it being managed? How have guests been treated and prepared for their roles? Who is, and is not in the room? Who is responsible for the conversation, and who will feel its consequences, and how?

At the closing dinner of the programme, the *Boycott & Mobilisation* Working Group declared that they had discussed the importance of artists' unions to the impact of the anti-apartheid boycott movement at length. In this regard, they told us, they had also discussed the notion of a 'culture of protest'. A member of the *Fees & Conditions* group also mentioned it is important to remove the notion of stigma and shame surrounding the disclosure of fee amounts, or of contemplating the possibility of refusing a certain arrangement. These are just some examples of the 'politics in the room' throughout the event.

Humans of the Institution can be seen a symptom of a growing culture of resistance, among arts professionals – freelancers and institutional alike. The numerous

and rich discussions undertaken throughout Humans of the Institution may not have led to concrete or similar sounding answers. What is clear, however, is that there seems to be a need to collectively look more closely at curatorial accountability, and a broader understanding of the historical contexts of our practices, in order to move toward formations of solidarity that might be able to meet the challenges of current practice dilemmas.

Anne Szefer Karlsen and Vivian Ziherl
online, May 2018





Audience (top), speaker Sabina Sabolović and curator Anne Szefer Karlsen (bottom).

1 See https://www.ser.nl/en/Publications/Publications/Valuing-passion-Reinforcing-the-labour-market-in-the-cultural-and-creative-sector and https://www.cultuur.nl/english/summary-valuing-passion/item3722 (accessed 27 June 2019).

2. Norsk Kuratorforening – kuratorens arbeidsvilkår og oppdragsgivere Prosjektrapport nr 6/2017 (The Norwegian Association of Curators – Members' Working Conditions and Potential Employers Project report no. 6/2017) by Cecilie Andersen and Kirsti M. Hjemdahl/Agderforskning.

Programme

SATURDAY 25 NOVEMBER – *WHOSE GLOBAL, WHOSE LOCAL?*

10am–1pm / Morning Session

Position Papers:
Rachel O'Reilly and Danny Butt
(presented by Rachel O'Reilly)
Desedimentation, Delamination, Deconstruction: Boycotts Unseen or that Never Eventalise

Despina Zefkili
Energy and Sustainability – 'The Southern Perspective'

Keynote:
Ahmed Veriava
Provincialising Work

1–3pm / Lunch and free salsa lessons organised in preparation for Sobredosis de amor

3–6pm / Afternoon Session

Plenum:
Whose Global, Whose Local?
moderated by Anne Szefer Karlsen and Vivian Ziherl
Club Solo (Thomas Bakker & Iris Bouwmeester), Charles Esche, Natasha Ginwala, Lara Khaldi, Carol Yinghua Lu, Alan Michelson, Sabina Sabolović

6–8pm / Dinner

8–9pm / Evening Programme
A visit to the opening of *Black & Revolutionary: The Story of Hermina and Otto Huiswood* at Vereniging ons Suriname; initiated by the Black Archive and New Urban Collective, curated by **Imara Limon**, and featuring works by artists **Raul Balai**, **Brian Elstak** and **Iris Kensmil**.

'In The Black Archives, New Urban Collective discovered the story of two black revolutionaries: a hidden history of an adventurous struggle against colonialism, racism and economic inequality.'

SUNDAY 26 NOVEMBER – *PRECARIOUS PRACTICES*

10am–1pm / Morning Session

Position Papers:
Antonia Majaca
Against Curating as Endorsing

Bassam El Baroni
The Post-Agonistic Institution: Art, Democracy, and the Curatorial

Keynote:
Tiziana Terranova
Competition and Cooperation in Social Cybernetics

1–3pm / Lunch and free salsa lessons organised in preparation for *Sobredosis de amor*

3–6pm / Afternoon Session

Plenum:
Precarious Practices
moderated by Anne Szefer Karlsen and Vivian Ziherl
Matthijs de Bruijne, Maria Hlavajova, Heejin Kim, Imara Limon, Manuela Moscoso, Nana Oforiatta Ayim, Natalia Valencia

6–8pm / Dinner

8–9pm / Evening Programme
Sobredosis de amor is a danceable lecture
by **Ericka Florez & Hernán Barón**

Florez and Barón invited the *Humans of the Institution* to dance during this lecture, while the lecturers, through its soundtrack, analysed the drug trafficking conflict and its most difficult decade of the 1980s in Colombia.



Introduction Saturday 25 November by Vivian Ziherl, Anne Szefer Karlsen and Anne Breure (Veem)



Position Paper Saturday 25 November by Rachel O'Reilly & Danny Butt, *Desedimentation, Delamination, Deconstruction*



Position Paper Saturday 25 November by Despina Zefkili, *Energy and sustainability – 'the southern perspective'*



Keynote Saturday 25 November 2017 by Ahmed Veriava, *Provincialsing work.*



Plenum Saturday 25 November 2017: *Whose Global, Whose Local?* With Club Solo (Thomas Bakker & Iris Bouwmeester), Charles Esche, Natasha Ginwala, Lara Khaldi, Carol Yinghua Lu, Alan Michelson, Sabina Sabolović and present audience. Balcony Callers: Ahilapalapa Rands and Lise Soskolne.



Natasha Ginwala's contribution to the plenum Saturday 25 2017can be accessed via password that can be obtained by contacting the Faculty of Fine Art, Music and Design at the University of Bergen or email humansoftheinstitution@uib.no.



Introduction Sunday 26 November 2017 by Vivian Ziherl, Anne Szefer Karlsen, Gabriëlle Schleijpen (DAI).



Position Paper Sunday 26 November 2017 by Antonia Majaca, *Against Curating as Endorsing*, can be accessed via password that can be obtained by contacting the Faculty of Fine Art, Music and Design at the University of Bergen or email humansoftheinstitution@uib.no.



Position Paper Sunday 26 November 2017 by Bassam El Baroni, *The Post-Agonistic Institution: Art, Democracy, and the Curatorial*



Keynote Sunday 26 November 2017 by Tiziana Terranova, *Competition and cooperation in social cybernetics.*



Plenum Sunday 26 November 2017: Precarious Practices. Plenum, Sunday 26 November 2017 with Matthijs de Bruijne, Maria Hlavajova, Heejin Kim, Imara Limon, Manuela Moscoso, Nana Oforiatta-Ayim, Natalia Valencia and present audience. Balcony Callers: Ahilapalapa Rands and Lise Soskolne.



Poster, designed by Marc Hollenstein, featuring the 'dressed H'.



Sobredosis de amor is a danceable lecture created by Ericka Florez with Hernán Barón in 2014. Sunday 26 November 2017 Florez and Barón invited the *Humans of the Institution* to dance during this lecture, while they through its soundtrack analysed the drug trafficking conflict and its most difficult decade of the 1980s in Colombia. The project was created as part of La Nocturna's program in Cali, Colombia. La Nocturna is an artist collective platform that experiment with discursive and pedagogical formats.





Artists Ericka Florez (top) and Hernán Barón (bottom) during the performance *Sobredosis de amor*, a danceable lecture that was hosted at the end of the two conference days of *Humans of the Institution*, Sunday 26 November 2017, at Veem House for Performance.





Humans of the Institution was curated and moderated by Vivian Ziherl, Frontier Imaginaries (top) and Anne Szefer Karlsen, Curatorial Practice, Faculty of Fine Art, Music and Design, University of Bergen (bottom).

CREDITS

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